KURINCI-P-PATTU MUTTOLLAYIRAM

P.N. APPUSWAMI

உலகத் தமிழாராய்ச்சி நிறுவனம்
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TAMIL STUDIES

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KURINCI-P-PATTU
(LOVE IN THE VALLEY)

MUTTOLLAYIRAM

256

TRANSLATOR: P.N. APPUSWAMI (LATE)

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EDITORIAL NOTE

KURINCI-P-PATTU - MUTTOLLAYIRAM

Dr. S. Ramar Ilango
International Institute of Tamil Studies
Chennai

Mr. P.N. Appuswami who began his life as a lawyer held translation into Tamil of Essays of Science in English as his life-ambition.

While serving in the Dept. of Translation in this Institute he translated no less than 120 Sangam poems into English. He had sound knowledge and wide experience in the art of translation. His style is simple and sweet.

Of the translators of Sangam poems into English for the use of non-tamil scholars and readers Appuswami holds a place of pride.

Mr. P.N. Appuswami has translated Kurinci-p-pattu one of the poems in the Pattupattu (Ten Songs) by Kapilar into English in 1973. He had added laurels to his ability in translations by translating a later Tamil classic. 'Muttollayiram' by an unknown poet into English in 1977.

These two rare works were given to the Institute by Mr. T.N. Ramachandran, a lawyer in Thanjavur and a no mean translator himself. I thank him for this gift on behalf of the Institute.

Our thanks are due to the Directorate of Tamil Development for their Financial Assistance under the scheme of translation into other languages.

Mr. Tamilkudimagan, Hon'ble Minister for Tamil Official Language, Culture, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments who heads this Institute is its Friend, Philosopher and Guide and a source of constant inspiration and help. The Chairman's wish is that a lot of such works should be undertaken by the International Institute of Tamil Studies. Mr. V. Palanichamy the Secretary to Govt. Department, Tamil Development -Culture also helps the Institute to grow from strength to strength. The Institute is immensely indebted to them.

DIRECTOR

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PREFACE

India is a multi-lingual country and each language has its great literature, both ancient and modern. It is however not given to everybody to read and enjoy the beauties of other Indian languages, excepting his own. There is in fact an utter lack of interest in most of us to know the writings in other languages. The Editors have genuinely felt this indifference and would like to create an interest in the readers to take to such studies. We also intend to bridge the gap by providing sincere and reliable translations.

Kurinji in Tamil is the name of a rare flower that blooms but once in twelve years. Kurinji is also the back-ground for the great love poems of ancient Tamils. There is an unusual blending of directness with symbolism in the early Tamil poems and the young lovers have to meet only in Kurinji, the hills and the hilly region. Thus, Kurinji, in a broader sense also denotes, the meeting place.

It is our earnest desire that Kurinji Quarterly will be the meeting place of all lovers of literature.

Fittingly, the first in the series is a translation of Kurinci-p-pattu, a Tamil idyll, written by Kapila nearly two millenniums ago. This remarkable poem, fresh with the dew of the dawn of Tamil literature, was rendered into English by Mr. P. N. Appuswami and appeared in Triveni nearly thirty years ago. The poem and the translation so greatly impressed the late Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, that he said, "To be unable to enjoy it is to be kept out of a great heritage".

The Editors sincerely hope to make the best of our heritage available to the readers in English.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Over two thousand years ago, the Tamils possessed a large body of poetry remarkable for its beauty, range, and variety. Their poets sang of war and love, of kings and birds, of heroes and maidens, of truth and honour, and all the noble virtues. Of religion too they sang, but as far as could be judged from the anthologies, it was not the dominant note which it became in later ages.

Selections were made out of this poetic literature ; and nine anthologies, of verse were compiled nearly eighteen centuries ago, perhaps, eight of these anthologies were of short poems, and the ninth *PATTU-P-PATTU* (The Ten Idylls) consisted of ten long poems.

The piece of which a rendering is given here is the eighth poem in this anthology, and it is two hundred and sixty one lines long in the original. It is called *KURINCI-P-PATTU*, and its author is the reputed *Kapila*, friend and companion of *Pari the Unique*.

The language of the poem is archaic, and the social scene it depicts is different from ours, yet its sentiments are extraordinarily fresh and modern.

This rendering was done over thirty years ago. The translator enjoyed the poem, and wished to communicate, to the extent possible by him, the joy so felt. The background of the poem, the scenes described therein, the behaviour, attitudes, and modes of thought of the characters involved, are very different from those current today. The language of the poem

is archaic, differing as much from modern Tamil as Chaucer differs from modern English, not as much as Beowulf though several centuries earlier. So, the rendering is not a translation, nor yet a paraphrase, but somewhere in between. The antiqueness has been sought to be conveyed by words like 'thee', and 'thou' and their corresponding verbs, and by the use of some words which are not altogether current coin. The emphasis and stresses in the poem are sought to be communicated by poetic inversions, and by the use of ree verse, and long and short lines, as seemed suitable.

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Introduction to

THE SANGHAM CLASSICS

R. S. DESIKAN M. A.

A nation's greatness does not lie in her brick and mortar ; but the measure of her glory is fathomed by her noble and splendid achievements in the field of art and literature. It is to the ceaseless and untiring efforts of the late Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Ayyar that we owe the unearthing of a glorious body of literature of which any nation may be legitimately proud. Our ancestors have bequeathed to us a rich heritage of wisdom and imperishable classics which age cannot wither nor custom stale.

It is no exaggeration to say that one may recognize the well of Tamil undefiled in our Sangam Classics which have exercised a tremendous influence on the Alwars and Nayanmars. All the literary conventions of the classical age have been pressed into service for forging new patterns of spiritual experiences.

War and love which are the governing features of the Sangam Classics have assumed a new tone and colour in the hands of these mystics. These God-intoxicated men have poured the rich wine of their experiences into old bottles. It was the war without ; now it has become a war within ; the human love has been transfigured into divine love.

Kamban's great epic is indeed a noble commentary on the influence of the classics which have really shaped his

extraordinary genius. The immortal voice of the classics is heard in the poetry of Bharathi. In short all our great literary achievements have their living root in the classics.

Tamil has a hoary tradition ; and it is coeval with Sanskrit. Tholkappiyam which is a treatise on grammar must have been written more than two thousand years ago. The author traces the romance of Sanskrit words which have crept into Tamil. Besides a treatise on grammar cannot but pre-suppose a glorious wealth of literature that must have perished beyond recall. One can very well imagine the great antiquity of Tamil. Tholkappiyam reveals to us in an abundant measure a vanished civilization of the ancient Tamils.

But the vitality of our language is preserved ; and the words then used are current. For instance 'madi' which means indolence or idleness is still the spoken word in Malayalam, An Englishman cannot make out an Anglo-Saxon text, if he has no hard training and discipline in that direction, but the language of the Tamil Classics is not far removed from the language of to-day. Such is the robust nature of our language, which persists through ages. It is an effective and noble instrument with which one may unlock the inner-most secrets of one's own soul.

The Sangam Classics fall into two sharp sections— 'Akam' and 'Puram'. Akam or subjective poetry deals with love ; whereas Puram or objective poetry is concerned with war and other external activities. Man's heroic achievements and noble deeds in the affairs of the world find their greatest expression in Puram. In 'Akam' even the name of the beloved or the lover ought not to be mentioned. The vaguest hint

would banish it from the region of the Akam ; and it would be placed within the pale of Puram. It is indeed a very narrow definition of 'Akam'. It is better that it includes all the inner working of the human heart, its joys and sorrows, its hopes and fears, its storm and sunshine. Some of the songs which are included in 'Purananooru' may be admitted to the rank of the finest lyrics which the world has ever seen.

In 'Purananooru' we find a lyric of the highest order. An old man bent double with the weight of old age looks at the sun-lit meadows of his youth through the casement of his withered old age. He laments over the vanished innocent joys of the spring-time of his youth. "Will the youth with all its innocent pastimes ever return to me ?" is the passionate cry of the old man who falls into a melancholy reverie over the buried joys of his early childhood. We perceive the same note of sadness in Thomas Moore's poem 'The Light of Other Days'.

Oft in the stilly night,
  Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond Memory brings the light
  Of other days around me :
  The smiles, the tears
  Of boyhood years,
The words of love then spoken ;
  The eyes that shone,
  Now dimm'd and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken ;
  Thus in the stilly night,
  Ere slumber's chain has bound me
Sad memory brings the light

Of other days around me.
When I remember all
The friends so lik'd together
I have seen around me fall
Like leaves in wintry weather,
I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed !
Thus in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

Is it not exceedingly surprising and strange that this mood of an old man lamenting over his vanished youth was captured and imprisoned in one of the immortal lyrics of the Sangam Age ?

In the mellow light of the musing moon, the daughters of Pari are wandering alone with Kapilar across a lonely blasted heath. The glory and splendour of the moon bring back to their memory the joyous days which they spent among the lovely hills of their celebrated father. They burst into a song which for its sweetness, pathos and simplicity and directness stands unsurpassed in the realm of poetry. It is indeed a tear-compelling poem which speaks to us across the vast gulf of years. Poems of this mould and tint and colour ought to have found a place in 'Akam'.

Besides the poems in the anthologies of love cannot be called lyrics in the strictest sense of the term. A lyric is the expression of a single mood. It should be full of haunting melody. It should be highly subjective and give expression to the personality of the poet. But Akananooru, Kurunthokai and others abound in monologues. The poet creates dramatic situations in which the lover or his love pours forth his or her ecstasy of union or agony of separation. The personality of the poet recedes into the background. The rare combination of the lyrical and the dramatic elements constitutes the charm of a dramatic monologue—a species of composition which was long ago anticipated in our literature before Browning of the 19th Century. In Kulasekara Alwar, this kind of composition has reached its acme of perfection in his 'lament of Devaki'.

Nartrinai, Kurunthokai, Iyngurunooru, Pathitruppattu, Paripadal, Kalithokai, Akananooru and Purananooru are the eight anthologies. 'Pathitruppattu' deals with the heroic achievements of the Cheras ; Purananooru gives us glowing accounts of the incessant wars waged among the three Tamil kingdoms, the Chera, the Chola and the Pandya ; and their terrible wrath and vengeance are described with such gruesome minuteness of details that they make our blood creep and it contains also details of the trembling pity and compassion that extend even to the straggling mullai creeper. Extreme compassion and dire cruelty meet and jostle in Purananooru. The heroic womanhood of the Tamils, who delight in fierce war has found its glorious expression in Purananooru ; however, one can even fashion an utopia out of the noblest utterances of the poets who have dreamt a world of love and affection.

A poet sings that he does not belong to any narrow walled city ; he addresses the whole world as his one vast dwelling place ; and all her denizens are his own kith and kin ; he does not admire anyone, however gifted and exalted nor does he look down upon any poor specimen of humanity however lowly and subject. What Einstein says in one of his addresses has found the same expression in Purananooru. Even prayer to God for one's own liberation is considered to be a kind of barter. Such is the disinterested idealism of the poet.

The true breath of democracy which stands for equality blows through the poem of this poet, who has risen above barriers of caste and creed. But it must be confessed that we come across the serene heights of wisdom and love and the internal depths of horror and cruelty and the fierce nakedness of power. Even admidst the yell of violence and hymn of hatred, a noble note is also struck.

Like the Greeks, the Tamils delight in the pleasures of the senses. Music, wine and woman have filled them with unalloyed joy ; and they are not vexed with the unquiet dreams and the troubled thoughts of the world to come. We are deeeply struck by their humanistic approach to life. With the impact of Buddhism and Jainism, they have become sickled over with the pale cast of thought of the unknown. A deep shadow has begun to fall across their sun-lit lawn of existence . With the advent of Christianity, we too behold a similar cloud hovering around the joyous horizan and the bright landscape of the Greeks.

War and love are the external themes of the Sangam poets. Mars and Venus seem to be their guiding stars in their domain of poetry. In Kurunthogai the poet creates a

situation. The beloved knows that her lover has arrived and that he has hidden himself behind a tree and she sings in praise of the glory of love, so that her lover may over-hear it.

"The love of my lord of the hills is vaster than the earth, loftier than the sky and deeper than the sea".

In "Pattinappalai" the lover describes all the glories of 'Pukar'; but he comes to the conclusion, that the splendour of the far-famed city shrivels into nothingness before the beauty and charm of the rounded-perfection of the shoulders of his beloved.

From the love anthologies of the Sangam Age, one may easily construct the frame of love life. The mountain solitude (Kurinji) the Woodland Scene (Mullai) the agricultural tract (Marudam) the sea-shore (Naidal) and arid region (Palai) figure in Sangam poetry. Each region has its own favourite God, its song, and flower. Love first blooms on a long hill. It is always a love at first sight. The frequent visits of the lover rouse the suspicion of the people who keep afloat all kinds of wild rumours. The beloved elopes with her lover and settles down in a woodland. The marriage is celebrated; and the husband goes in search of wealth or he is engaged in a war fighting the battle of his king. Only in winter the husband returns home from the far-off ringing battle-field. The patient watching of the wife, and the agony of her separation from her husband are described in a remarkable manner. Sullen clouds gather in the sky; there is the loud bellowing of the thunder heard; and the quick-flashes of lightning remind her of the fast approach of her husband who is equally impatient to reach home and embrace his long-parted beloved in a silent tender mystery of love.

The desert becomes the scene of separation ; and the moaning of the sea suggests a sense of desolation which finds expression in the following lines :

"It is the dread mid hour of the night ; the noises of the world have died away. It is wrapt in a profound slumber ; I am the only one awake in the dull solitary watches of the night"—thus sings the beloved gazing at the distant roaring sea.

We can never forget a moving situation in which the fostermother goes in search of the girl who has eloped with her lover. She wanders over hills and dales and comes to the fringes of a desert that spreads itself before her. Her eager gaze sweeps across the endless illimitable sands. She sings "I have grown weary and foot-sore with endless wanderings. My eyes have grown dim with gazing at the distant horizon. More than the countless stars in the sky are the people that move about the world ; but my beloved is nowhere to be seen".

Tennyson too in his "Lotus Eaters" describes the eyes of the sea-worn mariners growing dim with gazing on the pilot stars.

The Mullai region is resonant with the mellow music of the flute of the shepherds piping for ever under the chequered shade of the trees. The pastoral scenes have their own ineffable charm, The lowing of the cows, the tinkle of the bells of the drowsy cattle in the distant folds, the wistful gaze of the parted lovers at the gathering gloom of a wintry sky—all this has been painted with the rare skill and charm of a consummate literary artist. The recognition of brothel as an institution in 'Marutham' may be considered a blot on the fair civilization of the ancient Tamils. It is Thiruvalluvar

that protests againt the wild life of his age. His fulmination against the wine and debauchery and dire cruelty is born of his extraordinary ethical sense and his perception of the great values of life. In him we cannot but recognize a great reformer whose lofty teachings remind us of the grandeur and majesty of the sermon on the mount. The literary conventions may have become artificial with the long passage of time ; but none may deny the fact that they must have had their strong basis in the living experiences of the people.

The Sangam Classics give us a series of pictures of the social life of the age. The great respect and veneration which the Brahmins commanded, the dire poverty of the poets, the boundless generosity of the kings and patrons, their intense love of music, their keen and minute observation and appreciation of Nature, the lofty idealism of some solitary poet stretching his arms to perfection—all these things move before us, as we wander among the Sangam Classics.

They live close to nature. They revel in the hues and fragrance of countless flowers. They draw their imageries from the infinite book of nature. The stillness of the starry skies, the darkness that broods over land and water, the unceasing murmur of the innumerable mountain rills, the moan of the distant seas, the rumble of the gathering clouds, the ceaseless patter of the rains, the quick play of the forked lightning and the shifting pageant of colours among evening skies have an appeal to them. Their life is not divorced from the joys of the earth ; and their deep humanism is enshrined in their classics which are a possession and a joy for ever.

LOVE IN THE VALLEY

(KURINCI-P-PATTU)

O mother dear !
Long live thou mother dear !
I pray thee hearken unto me.
My friend's brow still gleams bright,
And her soft tresses luxuriant wave ;
But on her lovely limbs
A cruel malady,
Beyond the power of medicines to cure,
Loosens her peerless jewels.
Thou too sufferest,
Worried and uneasy ;
But knowing naught,
Art perplexed and distracted sore.
All over the city, broad and wide,
Thou seekest to question
The oracles who know ;
And thou payest homage
To many Gods.
Of varied shapes and forms—
Praising them,
Worshipping them,
Strewing upon them a medley of flowers,
And offering them
Incense and fragrant sandal.
    Gone is my friend's exquisite loveliness now ;
Her sweet and shapely shoulders droop :
Strangers, alas !
Notice her loosening bangles.

An utter loneliness has come upon her,
And torments her sore indeed.
So within her dewells a rare melancholy,
Harboured by her in secret,
Sapping her very life.
    Since it was too grave for words
I kept my counsel till now
With exceeding difficulty.
    For, jewels
Which were fashioned ever so well
With pearl and gem and gold
Should snap and break,
Surely the fragments can be matched again :
But, if men should fail
In nobility,
Or excellence rare,
Or conduct exemplary,
Then, to cleanse the stain of such infamy,
And to restore their fame to former brightness
Were hard indeed
Even to the great ones—
Those learned men,
Whose minds are free from doubt.
Thus say those
Who know the ancient lore.
    'Though my love and innocence
Together sought to restrain me,
Yet, evading the strict and difficult watch

´Of my father—
He of the tall chariot—
To wed thus
Did both of us choose,
After due deliberation.
If I should acquaint them with this,
How can they blame me ?
If, however,
They come not over to my side,
I have resolved
To suffer in patience—
(Till I die)—
Hoping that we shall at last
Unite again in another world'
Thus mused she, my friend.
    Her eyes, tranquil as a fawn's,
Are flushed and perturbed.
Utterly broken-hearted
And too tender to bear the agony,
She too pines in misery.
Like wise seers,
Who stand betwixt two mighty kings,
Who wage fierce war against each other,
Ere they seek to restore peace,
I too stand
Betwixt two great fears,
Which are too heavy for me to bear—
Afraid of you, and afraid for her.

If thou givest her hand in marriage,
Everything will end happily,
For both the clans
Equal are in parity.
Compare not, nor yet discuss
What his merits are,
Or how endowed he is.
I have endeavoured to tell thee,
That you may perceive it well,
The whole course of this event—
Of this difficult deed,
That, alone
I have dared to do
That we might save her life.
I pray thee
Be not wroth with us.

'Like elephants' trunks,
Dangling betwixt their pearly tusks,
When they uplift their heads
To look at the grain
Sprouting from the tip of the tall bamboo,
Seem the bent and downy crests
Of the little millet,
Which has put forth
Many a large ear of ripening corn,
Which, but now, has its greenness lost.
'Go ye thither', saidst thou,
'And drive away the birds

Which fall upon the corn,
And when night falls,
Return ye here'.
And thou sentest us forth,
So we went
And climbed upon the platform
Which tigers dread to see,
The platform built
By the watchman of the night,
High among the treetops.
The whirling whistle,
The riven rattle,
The twanging toy-bow,
And all the other gadgets custom-designed
Tó scare the parrots off
Were there
Prettily fashioned from the cane
On those hill-slopes growing.
We wielded them all
As suited the occasion.
And while the puissant rays of the sun
Scorched everything with their dazzling heat,
And birds
Which circled in the sky
Fled in eager haste
Seeking desired nests,
Serried rows of clouds

Scampering on high altitudes,
After scooping the waters of the ocean
Dark and full,
Shrinking it,
Were huddled together
By the blasts of wind
Which blew across
The wide and dark blue sky,
And were thrown
Into utter confusion
By the mighty thunder
Which yet rumbled sweet
Like a gently quivering drum.

Like the shining lance of steel,
Engraved with many a leaf-design,
Which the red hued god,
Owner of the sweet toned drum,
Wearer of gleaming jewels,
Uplifted against his enemies,
Seemed the irregular lightnings
Which flashed from the gathered clouds
Which poured their waters
On the crests of the hill.
From the high peaks
Of our chieftain's hill
The pellucid waters jumped down
Fluttering like snow-white linen sheets.

In those white cascades
We bathed
With unabated relish
And utter abandon ;
And we plunged and dived
In the spacious pools
Which seemed like liquid crystal poured ;
And carefree,
We sang
On the hillside dense with rock.
Like sapphires
Set against a golden background
Seemed our black and braided tresses
Which trailed and hung low
Against the small of our backs.
We wrung the water out,
And let the hair dry ;
And our eyes
Were shot with red
Through and through.
The bright red glory-lily
With petals big ;
The white water lily ;
The delicate *anicha* ;
The purple lily
Of the cool lake ;
The *eruzham*

With flowers like fire ;
The fragrant *sirissa* ;
The flowers of the blue mussel-shell
Which seem like sapphire gems ;
The many petalled bottle flower ;
The bunched flowers
Of the iron-wood tree ;
The wide open blossoms
Of the tanner's senna ;
The small bamboo ;
The oblique leaved jujube ;
The woolly caper ;
The trumpet flower
Fragrant with honey ;
The wild jasmine ;
The *champaka* flowers
Large and cool ;
The jasmine which flowers in the night ;
And the large flowered jasmine ;
Bunches of blue lilies
Gleaming like sapphires,
With their honey scenting the air ;
The glory-lily
Whose flower is like a flame ;
And other flowers
Which seem like vermilion spread
And the mountain madar

Thick and beautiful—
All these in a medley grew.*
Joyfully, we wandered
Among the flowers ;
Plucked them and piled them
On a broad boulder
Fresh-washed by the rain ;
And on that rock encumbered
Mountain slope,
Full of the sweet music
Played by the warbling birds,
Ever and anon,
With a loud voice
We shouted
Clear resounding words
To scare the parrots off.
We plucked the outer petals
From the flowers ;
And round her hip,
Broad like a snake's hood,
We draped a garment
Fashioned of leaves
And flowers trimmed.

*[This passage is greatly condensed. The Tamil poet describes with a joy that is apparent all the flowers which grew in that valley. His description reminds one of 'Spring Flowers' in James Thomson's 'The Seasons', of 'The Sensitive Plant' by Shelley, and of 'The Idle Flowers' by Robert Bridges.]

Garlands of abiding beauty
Of many a varied hue and dye
We strung among
Our soft black tresses
To adorn our head.
We rested under the cool shade
Where honey drips
From the flowers
Of the *asoka* tree
Whose lovely sprouts
Are tinctured like flames of fire.
And then—
Well oiled were his curly locks,
A mass of fragrant blackness
They were coated
With a cooling pomade
Whose aroma spread around.
Their wetness had been dried
And unravelled were their tangles
By the caress
Of gently combing fingers :
Perfume laden were they
With the fume
Of the sweet smelling core
Of the eagle-wood.
Round his anguented locks
Bees, striped in beauty,

Hummed like melodious lutes.
His black and bushy curls
Glistened like blue sapphire.
Mountain flowers
And flowers of the plain
Blossoms that grew
On twigs of shrubs and trees,
And those which on the waters grew,
Flowers of many a kind
And many a hue,
Were the choice flowers
Which he had strung
Into cool and fragrant chaplets.
Wreaths plaited
Of fragrant screw-pine leaves,
Which seem like silver ribbons,
He wore on his fair crown.
    We stood awed
At his godly bearing.
    A single strand of a garland
Woven with the fair petalled flowers
Of the green-stalked jasmine
Lay as a circlet
Around his head.
Behind an ear
Was jauntily stuck
A sprig of *asoka* leaf,

Whose bright flower
Is a red flame,
Its tender leaves
Fluttered against his massive shoulders.
He wore a paste of sandal
On his broad and muscular chest,
The abode of manly might,
Where fragrant garlands,
Emblems of his ancient clan,
Lay among glittering jewels.
Gripped firmly
In the palm of his brawny hand,
Well marked with auspicious lines,
Were a chased and banded bow
And picked arrows.
A delicately embroidered belt
He wore, tied in a secure knot.
Beautiful warrior anklets of gold,
Fine wrought and gleaming,
Lay around his ankles,
Rising and falling
With each swinging step.
Like young warriors
Armed with many spears,
And so powerful
That none dare come near,
Intent on laying waste

Enemy country,
Making their foemen flee,
And flushing with swollen wrath,
And blazing in anger
As they closed with the enemy,
Seemed those big clawed hounds of his.
They surrounded us on every side,
And rushed upon us
With gleaming fangs
As white as bamboo shoots,
And with frightful eyes
Which stared at us unwinkingly.
We rose up in haste
Trembling in every limb,
And our legs quaked
And our steps faltered,
While terror gripped our very hearts.
Bewildered,
We sought to escape
To a neighbouring field.
    As a lusty bull,
Who has fought his rivals off
And humbled their haughty pride,
When he spies a new cow
Standing in a neighbouring field,
And walks gracefully up to her,
So strode he towards us.

While we stood dazed and terror-struck,
With anxious solicitude,
He spoke sweet and gentle words
That fell aptly on our ears.
Our braided locks he praised.
And our beauty that was rare.
And then, he said,
'O young maidens, with shining bangles,
And lissom limbs that are atremble
And fair navels that are round,
And liquid eyes,
Which are so artless
And yet so wanton !
I came here
Seeking a quarry of mine
Which has eluded my pursuit.'
But, when we spake not in reply,
He felt sore distressed and abashed,
And he said,
'O gentle fair !
If my quarry
You may not betray,
Should you
Even your speech deny ?
Is that sinful too ?'
Then he broke off
A flowery branch full of leaves,

Round whose blossoms
With opened petals
Eager beetles
And covetous bees
Lingered and hummed
Harmonious notes
Which were as sweet
As the perfect melody
Evoked by a skilful lutanist
When he plucks with his hand
The strings of his lute.
Like a tusker
Snatching up his goad
Which he has snapped in twain,
He raised his twig aloft,
And in threatening splendour stood,
Silencing the harsh tumult
Of the baying hounds
Which had beset us
Thus he stood, expectant,
Awaiting the moment of our speech.
    In their short-pillared
And lowly huts
Thatched with stalks of millet,
When their housewives
With eyes soft as a doe's
Offered them the clear wine

Distilled from honey,
The watchmen drank,
And in their excessive joy
Forgot their careful watch,
The while an elephant
Thrust a vast and devouring mouth
And consumed the big field's yield,
Leaving but a few straggling crops.
Unable to bear the sight,
They strung their shapely bows,
Which seemed like snakes,
And with grief welling in their hearts,
And with a strength born of furious rage,
Flushed with anger,
They shot their arrows,
And sounded their bamboo rattles,
And rolling back their tongue
Whistled shrilly
Till all the forest re-echoed.
Other noises, too, they made,
Explosive, and loud :
And confronted the elephant,
Which trumpeted loud
Like the puissant thunder
We hear during the seasonal rains.
The elephant smote
The hard ground

With its massive trunk,
Black and rough—
Worthy limb of a worthy form
Flushed with anger,
And maddened with frenzy,
It uprooted the trees,
And in utter bewilderment,
Rushed upon us like Death.
    We knew not
Where to seek refuge.
So, impulsively,
Forgetting our modesty,
With palpitating hearts,
Our dainty fine-wrought bangles clinking,
We ran quickly,
And joined him,
And stood shuddering
Like peacocks possessed by spirits.

A long shafted arrow he chose,
One that was feathered well,
And bending his bow to the full,
Swiftly,
He planted the arrow deep
On the beautiful forehead
Of that elephant,
The leader of a herd.
Blood spurted from the wound,

And overspreading the animal's face,
Streamed downwards in a flood.
Mangled was its forehead.
Spotted and streaked with beauty.
It stood not its ground,
But growing faint and weary,
Turned tail and fled.

Thereafter,
Making that place seem
Like the sacred dance-floor
Of the sybils
Possessed by the spirit
Of the tall god,
Then,
We held one another's hands,
So that our arms seemed
Like the festooning garlands
Hung round the massive stem
Of the firm trunk
Of the sacred *kadamba* tree.
Thus clapsed,
We jumped into the foaming flood.
We were caught in its seething billows,
And were tossed about,
And we floundered
Like plantain trees

Wobbling on a crumbling shore,
Whereat,
That excellent and worthy gentleman
Shouted,
'O lovely maid with straying curls,
Be quiet and still,
And fear not,
For I shall presently
Hold thy fair loveliness.'
(He gathered her up from the flood)
And stroking her spotless, gleaming brow,
Was long lost in thought.
Then he looked up at my face
And smiled.

While thus he stood
Holding her close,
Her modesty and timid fear
Asserted themselves,
And she sought
To spring apart.
But he wouldn't let her go,
And clasped her in closer embrace,
Crushing her body into his own.

Thus,
Into the water of the long tarns

Beside the rocks
Strewn with ripe pepper
Delicious fruits
Drop from the boughs
Of the mango of massive trunk,
And the mellow fruits,
Succulent and juicy,
Of the sweet-smelling jack tree,
Fall therein,
The clear ferment
Mixes with the honey
From the ripened hives
Whose flow drives off
The sucking bees.
And peacocks drunk it
Taking it to be mere water.
As in the broad and open spaces
Of the sportive plain
Of a large city,
Celebrating a festival,
While the sweet instruments
Sound peal upon peal of melody,
Fair dancers upon the tight-rope
Tire when the rhythm quickens,
So tottered those drunken peacocks
(Unable to dance).
The cool and fragrant flowers

Of the red glory lilies,
Which grew on the peaks
Whose tops battle with the skies,
Are crumpled by the mountain nymphs,
And lie seductively
Overspreading the ground
And making it seem
Like a field
Covered with many a fine garment.
His country abounds
With such hills gleaming with beauty.
He is ever beloved of us—
That great warrior.
Understanding well
The state of my friend's feelings,
(Thus he spoke) ;
"Like one celebrating a feast
We shall give unstintingly
Large pots of boiled rice
To all who come,
That our rich mansion
May shine in splendour.
Its gates shall be opened wide
Enabling multitudes
To come in and feed.
Blameless, high-born men of noble birth
And all their kinsmen too.

We shall feast
With cooked rice
Soaked in the fat
Dripping from fresh-cooked meat.
And what they leave unconsumed
I shall deem it an honour
To share with thee.
So help me Righteousness !"

So spoke the worthy gentleman
Her doubts dispelling.
He invoked the God
Enthroned on the topmost crest
Of the high range of hills,
And prayed to him
With folded hands ;
And by that god he swore
That he would keep his promise,
And for a token
Drank that lovely water, clear and sweet.
    Her mind was quieted then.
    Then in a flower-laden grove,
Beloved of the shining gods
Whose mansions are in heaven,
They spent the entire day
Among the secret mountain caves,
Cementing the bonds of their love

Engendered by the elephant.

As the day departed,
The myriad rayed sun
Drove his seven horses downward,
Reached the mountains
And vanished from sight ;
Deer herds
Crowded round the foot of trees ;
Throngs of lowing cattle
Calling to their calves
Crowded into the homestead ;
The *anril* bird
With curving beak
And voice like a sounding horn
Cried to its mate
In the feathery perch
Of the black and stately palm ;
The serpent
Spat out its jewel ;
Oft, from many sides,
The shepherd swains
Evoked on sweet melodious lutes
The clear *ambal* note ;
The lily's beautiful petals
Slipped their buds and bloomed ;
In prosperous homes

Maidens wearing lovely bracelets
Lit the flaming lamps ;
While Brahmins performed
The evening rites :
On perches touching the sky
Foresters kindled a faggot fire ;
Round the mighty mountains
The lowering clouds grew dark ;
The forest resounded
With many voices ;
And the birds sang.
Like an angered king
Going to the war
The evening came on apace.

When he saw that
Again he spoke :
"O lovely maid with gleaming jewels,
When thy relatives bestow thee,
Grasping the palm of thy hand,
We shall celebrate a grand wedding
That all the world may know.
Yet, for a short while,
Be patient, and worry not".
True words and kind he spoke
And her unquiet was soothed then.

Like a stately bull

Protecting a herd,
He escorted us
Down to the ancient city gates
Where hangs the never silent drum.
At the drinking pool
He left us
Returning the way he came.

From then on,
With a love as great
As at the first meeting,
Every day,
Habitually,
He comes to us at night.
And, whenever he comes,
Should the watchmen
Hasten on their rounds,
Or shouldst thou awake from sleep,
Or should the moon appear,
Denied to him
Is the sweet rest
On her soft shoulders
Fair as the bamboo.
If we of our assignation fail,
He grows not impatient.
He is in the full prime of manhood ;
And his riches

Have not made him play false
And be untrue to himself.
Oft has he reflected
On his stealthy entry
Into this city of ours,
So full of peril ;
And his mind is now made up.

Full of dangers
Is the night.
Giant tigers
Which block and fill their caves ;
Monstrous leo-phants ;
Bears ;
Wild buffaloes with hollow horns ;
Elephants ;
And angry thunders
Cruel and murderous
And destructive in their might ;
Malignant deities ;
Deadly serpents creeping after their prey ;
Cavernous pools,
Dark and deep,
In whose eddying waters
Crocodiles, alligators,
And other dreadful beasts
Lie in wait ;

Gruesome spots
Where fell bandits
Pile their slain victims in a heap ;
Slippery paths ;
And blind *cul-de-sacs ;*
Horrible goblin shapes ;
And pythons huge ;—
These,
And many other hazards
Far deadlier than they,
Teem in the depths
Of the caves of his hill,
Where lofty peaks jostle each other.
Her large and wanton eyes
Soft as dew,
Wilt like a flower
Struck by heavy drops of hail.
Her eyelids droop,
And her inflamed eyes
Are wet with tears.
From their straining lashes
Tears drop like rain
Upon her bosom.
Day after day,
Her beauty is passing away
Like that of a peacock
Caught in a snare.

She quails and trembles,
Again and again,
Whenever she thinks of his dangers.
    This is our story, mother dear.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kapila, the author of Kurinci-p-pattu, was one of the most famous poets of the Sangam age. There are 279 poems, long and short, attributed to Kapila. He was a close friend and companion of Pari, a chieftain, celebrated in Tamil literature for his unfailing munificence. It is said that the Chera king Chelva Kadungo Vazhiathan was so much impressed with Kapila's poetry that he went up a hill-top and made Kapila a gift of all the land that his eyes could scan. The last days of the poet were not happy as his friend Pari was killed by his enemies. Kapila had to take care of Pari's daughters, whom he gave in marriage to a chieftain. He then gave up his life, unable to bear the loss of Pari.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

P. N. Appuswami, the writer of popular science in Tamil, is also a great scholar and critic in Tamil. He was on the board of editors of the Murray edition of Kamba Ramayanam. He has done singular service to Tamil by his brilliant English renderings of Tamil classics, which he has been doing for the last thirty years. His English essays and translations have appeared in Triveni, the Hindu and other leading English journals. He is the author of a number of works in English and Tamil.

MUTTOLLAYIRAM

(A TAMIL CLASSIC)

By

AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR

Translated with introduction and notes

By

P. N. APPUSWAMI

For

MY LIFELONG FRIEND

S. VAIYAPURI

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INTRODUCTION

Muttollayiram is an old Tamil poem of considerable merit. It has been recognised as a literary classic by Gunasagarar, Perasiriyar, Ilampuranar, and Nachinarkiniyar, four of the famous commentators of the late middle period of Tamil. This quartet bridged with careful scholarship, sympathetic understanding, genuine feeling, and loving tenderness, some of the great gaps in time, language, and manners, which lie between the ancient and the later periods of the development of Tamil. Those dedicated men, undoubtedly gifted with poetic imagination and insight, chose however to use their talents to interpret rather than to create, and they have, by their clear exposition of the ancient classics, made it easier for us to comprehend, in some measure, the life and thought of those far off days. They have often used illuminating quotations from other works, some of which are not now available, in order to illustrate the points they were making.

The word 'Muttollayiram' is a compound word. It may mean 'The Triple Nine Hundred', implying that it was a poem of nine hundred verses in praise of the three kings of the ancient Tamil land—namely, Chera, Chozha, and Pandya, so famous in history, myth, and legend. Or again, it may mean 'The Three

Nine Hundreds' suggesting that it was a poem of two thousand seven hundred lines. Scholars are not in complete agreement on this point—the pessimists preferring the latter meaning, so that they may sorrow more over the loss of so much of a classic, and the majority holding that it was at best only nine hundred verses long, and that we may try and be happy with what has been spared.

It is really a pity that the poem has not come down to us in its entirety. A little less than one eighth has survived up to our times, though the whole poem seems to have been in existence even as late as the twelfth century. It is an unfortunate fact that classics have been lost in all countries, and in all languages, owing to the apathy of the public, the limited nature of their appeal, and the perishable nature of the material on which they used to be written. So it is that a fragment of the poem, a bare one hundred and ten verses, has survived. These are all that is left of them, left of nine hundred. Only an eighth has shown up, like an iceberg above the water. The rest of them have been submerged in the cold sea of oblivion and neglect, and lost to us for ever. These are made up of (a) forty-four verses scattered in an anthology, classified, distributed, arranged under several heads, and interspersed with quite a few verses selected from other ancient works (b) of a group of sixty-five poems on the theme of the love of a maid for a man, which are found together at the tail end of the anthology, and (c) one poem not included in the anthology, but quoted by Ilampuranar

in one of his commentaries as from *Muttollayiram.* The three bits together total only one hundred and ten verses. We should be grateful to the anthologist and to the commentator for thus transmitting to us this heritage of the past.

In one sense we may say that we are beholden to the commentators even more than we are to the anthologists, for their services to us. While the anthologists have merely collected the poem which would otherwise have been lost, the commentators have explained what might not have been understood, and could therefore have remained a profitless collection. These learned commentators lived about six hundred years ago, and formed the middle span of the bridge linking us with the anthologists of the past. But for their help, and the remarkable clarity of their writing, some at least of the poems composed some centuries earlier than their collection, and written in the antique language of that earlier period, and dealing with the manner of life and modes of thought prevalent then, would have puzzled us a great deal.

The anthology which has helped to preserve some of the verses of *Muttollayiram* is *Purattirattu. Muttollayiram* is, according to the old commentators, a literary composition which belongs to the category of what the ancient grammarian Tolkappiyar called '*viruntu*' by which he meant "fresh poetic composition in a new style".

Such works often bore characteristic titles. Some

titles were linked with the name of the hero or heroine, e. g. *Civaka Cintamani*, *Manimekalai*. Some were indicative of the subject matter, e. g. *Cilappatikaram* (The Lay of the Anklet). Some were related to the theme, e. g. (a) *Takatur-Yattirai* (The Expedition against Takatur), and (b) *Muppal* (one of the names of Tiru-k-kural, as it dealt with the three earthly human objectives, namely, aram (dharma), porul (artha), and inpam (kama). Some titles denoted the size or quality, e. g. *Perum-katai* (The Great Story, the story which deals with the romance of Udayana and Vasavadatta) ; and *Kurumtokai* (An anthology of short poems). Some were named after the metrical, or prosodic mode adopted in the work, e. g. *Kali-t-tokai* and *Paripatal*. Some gave a clue to the number of verses contained therein, e. g. *Patirru-p-pattu* (The Ten Tens). Some had fancy titles e. g. *Narrinai* (The Good Theme, which was no more than an anthology of love poems). Some were named from a combination of one or more of these, e. g. *Akananuru*, *Purananuru*, *Aimkurunuru*, *Civaka Cintamani*. Some of the Sangham classics were also named after the total number of works forming a set, e. g. *Ettu-to-tokai* (Eight Anthologies, and *Pattu-p-pattu* (Ten Long Poems).

The Rediscovery

Till nearly seventy years ago, *Muttollayiram* was, even to Tamil scholars, no more than the name of an old poem which some of the commentators on *Tolkap-*

MUTTOLLAYIRAM

A Tamil Classic

of

Over 1300 years ago

by

An unknown Author

(A fragment of 110 verses)

piyam had mentioned. The complete work seems to have survived down to the times of commentators since they refer to it and also quote from it. Perasiriyar commenting on sutra 239 of *Tolkappiyam* (in the section on prosody), says that *Muttollayiram* is an example of a poetic composition in a new style and form. It was therefore a new poem consisting of several verses and written by a single author, and was not an anthology or collection of poems written by several authors sometime previously, as the Sangam poems were. Nachinarkiniyar, another famous commentator, dealing with sutra 118 of *Tolkappiyam* (in the section on prosody) says that verses of four lines predominate in *Muttollayiram*. The suggestion seems to be that it contained some verses of more than four lines, perhaps of five or six. Perasiriyar confirms this inference when he states that the maximum number of lines in any verse of *Muttollayiram* is six. Whatever it be, all the verses of *Muttollayiram* which have come down to us contain only four lines and no more.

We do not know what the order was in which author had set the verses in his poem—whether, for example, he had followed any classifications based on the themes of the verses, or had arranged them under the heads of the kings they dealt with, or had merely strung them as he made them, and in a more or less haphazard way. In the 109 poems selectively included in *Purattirattu*, love poems form the majority in the ratio of 65 to 44, and the commentator Perasiriyar states that they formed the major portion of the complete

work as well. However, none of the manuscripts of *Purattirattu* now in existence contains any love poem,and the sixtyfive love poems we have now in the book are found only in the manuscripts entitled *Purattirattu-c-curukkam* (a condensation of *Purattirattu.*) A condensation cannot contain poems not in the original. We have therefore to presume that the portion of the original *Purattirattu* which contained the love poems was also lost.

We do not know the name of the author of *Muttollayiram*, for none of the commentators mentions it. There is no internal evidence in the poems which have come down to us, to tell us about his name, or about the region in which he lived and wrote, or about any of his contemporaries. Many kings of the three royal lines are mentioned, and some cities too ; but they are referred to in such general terms that no particular king of any clan is definitely indicated. The poet does not anywhere declare his loyalty to the king of any particular region, or to any specified city. So we do not know in which part of the Tamil country the poet lived, though perhaps it may be claimed that there are some indirect references of his loyalty to the Chozha kings.

Hazarding, on insufficient material, a tentative determination of the date of the poem, one may perhaps say that it may have been composed at any time between the fifth and the thirteenth centuries, and probably somewhere about the middle of these two limits.

The period in which the famous commentators Gunasagarar, Perasiriyar, Ilampuranar, and Nachinarkiniyar, flourished should have been some centuries after *Muttollayiram* was composed.

All that we know with some degree of dependability about the poem is that its author was most probably a devotee of the gods Siva and Muruga. This is an inference drawn by the manner in which he refers to them in three of the verses among those now available, namely verses 1, 1464, and 1465, of *Purattirattu*, being numbers 1, 18, and 19, in this translation. The ideas expressed in some of the verses of *Muttollayiram*, and in some of the poems of the Vaishnavite and Saivite hymnists are similar. These similarities, however, cannot be depended upon to settle any claims of priority in date. It is very difficult to say who echoes whom, or whose is the original voice and whose the echoing one, unless we can be sure of the definite priority of one to the other, through other sources of information. And again, both could be echoes of still prior voices. Further, poets of different periods and localities, expressing themselves in different languages, without any kind of links or contacts, resemble each other in sentiment and expression, more often than we expect.

The style of the poem considered as a whole is somewhat antique, yet slightly different from the poems of the Sangham period. We notice in it a slightly larger proportion of Sanskrit words than in the very early works. Some of the grammatical forms seem to indi-

cate that the poem may, perhaps, have been composed before the period of the hymnists. But none of thess can be regarded as conclusive evidences to fix the date of its composition with any certainty.

One or two features of the poem may not perhaps appeal much to modern readers. The repeated use of permanent epithets, and of similar ideas in praise of kings, may even hurt a little e. g. 'bright blade', 'angry king', 'frenzied elephants', 'garlanded chest', occur too often almost. But the monotony, if any, is relieved by the use of diferent words and phrases, by different arrangements of the words, and by the alterations of their relative positions in the verses. On the whole, the poem does and should please, for some of the conceits are clever, and striking, and some of the ideas are very aptly expressed with brevity and tenderness.

There are a few exaggerations here and there, and these are likely to be blamed as an oriental characteristic. But since 'poetry is a fine excess', the response to them will depend upon the tolerance, sympathy and sensitivity, of the readers, and upon their attitude to poetry in general. The preconditioned reader will find them enjoyable, for the poems are concise in form, compact in expression, pregnant with ideas, and felicitous in diction.

Purattirattu

Purattirattu is an anthology of one thousand five hundred and fifty-seven poems from thirty-one

definitely named sources, and thirteen other poems from sources not named and not ascertainable at present, thus making a total of one thousand five hundred and seventy poems in all. The name of the compiler is not known, nor are any details about the period in which he lived, or the conditions which prompted him to compile a work of such range and quality. One very helpful feature of the compilation is the mention of the name of the work from which the selection has been made. According to Prof. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, who brought out a scholarly edition with the aid of several manuscripts (and noting variant readings), the anthology may have been compiled between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries of the Christian era.

The anthology consists of two major sections, which may be called 'The General Section', and 'The Section on Love'. All the verses included in the general section of this anthology have been grouped under eleven heads. The last or twelfth section deals with 'love' (the love of a maid for the king) and it contains poems from *Muttollayiram* alone, and there is no subgrouping. The grouping or classification of the general section is more or less similar to that followed in *Tirukkural*. The whole classification falls under twelve heads thus: (i) Benediction (1); (ii) Country (829, 830, 831); (iii) City (862, 863, 864); (iv) Dispraise of the Enemies' country (1278-1282); (v) Tribute (1285-1288); (vi) Storming the Fort (1431); (vii) Cavalry (1380); (viii) Elephantry (1388-1397); (ix) Battlefield (1430-1433); (x) Victory (1457 and

1457); (xi) Fame (1464-1473); and (xii) Love (The love of a maid for the king) (1506-1570). The numbers in brackets are the numbers which the verses from *Muttollayiram* bear in *Purattirattu* (Madras University Edition, 1938). They have been given in square brackets after each poem in the translation here.

Editions of Muttollayiram

The first edition of the surviving verses of *Muttollayiram* was published (in 1905 and reissued in 1935) by the Tamil Sangham, Madurai, a literary society for the preservation of Tamil and the promotion of Tamil Scholarship. It was founded by Pandithurai-t-Thevar (Pandittruraichami Thevar), a scion of the royal family of Ramnad. The editor was Mahavidvan R. Raghava Aiyangar, who was also the editor of *SEN TAMIZH*, the monthly magazine of the society, and was an amazing scholar, with a phenomenal memory; and who was extraordinarily sensitive to the nuances, graces, and beauties of ancient and later Tamil poetry. He had a charming personality, a mellifluous voice, and a most persuasive eloquence. His scholarship was very wide, and very deep, and his intellect was acute. He was extraordinarily generous in appreciating the scholarship of others, and did a great deal to encourage them. But curiously and inexplicably, his writing though precise, was crabbed and stiff, and difficult, perhaps because he loaded it with his scholarship. It may be said that he was almost an antithesis of Goldsmith, 'who wrote like an angel, but talk'd like poor Poll'.

This was followed, roughly thirty years later, by the appearance of these verses, not as a compact set(booklet) as the first edition did, but as separate verses scattered and grouped along with others under several heads, in an anthology, *Perum-Tokai* (literally, the Great Anthology), published by the Tamil Sangam of Madurai in 1935-36. It is stated in the Introduction to that anthology that what was then published had already appeared serially in the pages of *The SEN TAMIL*, the journal of the Sangam. The total number of verses included in the publication of nearly eight hundred pages was three thousand five hundred, which were classified under five heads or groups. Those verses had been culled from various sources, namely, (a) the illustrative verses quoted by the learned commentators on some of the ancient grammatical works like *Tolkappiyam*, *Yapparunkalam*, *Karikai*, *Viracozhiyam* etc., (b) from some unpublished manuscripts, (c) from some edited copper-plates published by the Archaeological Department, and (e) sometimes too, directly, from the lips of learned Tamil scholars who had memorised them but were not able to indicate their source.

The compilation, editing, writing of notes and comments, the subject index, and index of first lines, and a general and particular indication of their sources (given as foot-notes), were by Vidvan M. Raghava Aiyangar, first cousin of Mahavidvan R. Raghava Aiyangar above referred to. M. Raghava Aiyangar too was a brilliant, widely read, and discriminating Tamil Scholar over-shadowed only by his more brilliant

cousin. He too had been associated with the Madurai Tamil Sangam and had served as a Junior Editor, and later on as Editor-in-Chief of that magazine which did yeoman service in the early years of this century, when Tamil was almost a neglected language—that is, neglected by all but a few scholars, who and whose work are not even remembered now. M. Raghava Aiyangar served for a term of years as the Chief Tamil Pandit on the staff of the Madras University's *Tamil Lexicon*. After that stupendous work was completed, he retired therefrom, and served for some years as a Professor of Tamil in the University of Travancore. The verses of *Muttollayiram* on general topics, and those relating to the unrequited (one sided) love of a woman for a man (It would perhaps be more right to describe it as the callow love of teenage girls for the gaily dressed, richly retinued king of the land) are scattered over the whole of the anthology. Almost all the accredited verses of *Muttollayiram* are, however, to be found in some part of the anthology or other.

The third publication of the verses was through the scholarly edition of *Purattirattu* issued by the University of Madras in 1938. The Editor was Vaiyapuri Pillai who was then the Reader in its Department of Tamil. He had been a lawyer, well-read in English, and very widely and deeply in Tamil and in linguistics. His vision was clear and unprejudiced, and his mind had no preformed opinions, and was fully open. He brought to bear on all the work he did an unclouded, acute, logical and incisive intellect. He had an almost

scientific approach. He had carefully compared over a dozen manuscripts in the preparation of his edition of *Purattirattu* and had noted the variant readings when editing the text. The introduction and appendices to his edition show much scholarship, and are very useful. Bnt none of the manuscripts available to him could help him reconstruct verse 1397, which was so mangled and incomplete that no effective repair of it was possible.

The next edition of *Muttollayiram* was that of T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar in 1943, with an introduction, notes, and comments. It had some colour and line drawings, and was meant for the lay reader who loved poetry. He too was a lawyer. He had a sensitive feel for poetry, and a flair for exposition, particularly to lay audiences. He arranged the verses in groups of five, and he suggested that each poem should be read aloud, and that each group should be studied and relished lovingly and lingeringly, and should serve for a whole day's enjoyment. He has not followed the order in which the verses occur in *Purattirattu*, and has mixed the general themes and the love theme together. He has not explained his reasons, if there were any, for such grouping. In the main part of his book he has included ninety-nine of the verses ; and has pushed off into an appendix nine verses as ununderstandable. He has omitted altogether the mangled verse 1397 ; and has not taken any note of the verse quoted by *Ilampuranar* in his commentory as belonging to *Muttollayiram*. He has made various emendations of his own in the

verses, subjectively—emendations which are not supported by any of the available manuscripts, and which rest merely on his authority.

Another edition of *Muttollayiram* is a recent one publishcd by the Tirunelveli South India Saiva Siddhanta Publishing Society, with an introduction, notes and comments. The editor is Vidvan Setura-ghunathan who was a Lecturer in MDT Hindu College, Tirunelveli, and later served in a High School at Virudhunagar. He too has omitted the mangled verse (1397) ; but has included twenty odd other verses, as probably those of the author of *Muttollayiram*. The inclusion is mostly on subjective grounds, and partly on the basis of the parallelisms of ideas and phrases—criteria which are not authentic. His edition thus contains one hundred and thirty verses. It is rather difficult to accept the additional verses in the absence of more authoritative evidence to prove their authorship, and to accede to the claim that they really belong to *Muttollayiram*.

Yet another edition has been brought out (in 1957) by Pari Nilayam, Madras. The Editor is Sri R. Muthuganesan. It contains notes and explanations, and quite a few parallel passages.

There are one hundred and nine verses in all—an invocatory verse, twenty-two verses in praise of Chera, twentynine in praise of Chozha, and fifty-six in praise of Pandya, and the fragmentary verse (which has been

placed at the end, and no attempt has been made to explain it).

He has in some instances, preferred readings other than those accepted by the Editor of *Purattirattu*. One such changes 'Killi' into 'Kothai', and has taken away one verse from Chozha and given it toChera.

Some interpretations of his and his arrangement of the verses, differ from those in the present work. He believes, as does Mahavidvan R. Raghava Aiyangar, that the original poem consisted of three 'nine-hundreds', or two thousand seven hundred verses in all.

Finally, it is too much to hope that the whole poem may yet be recovered. Time, and insects, and man's neglect, have done their worst. Let us be thankful for the fragment that has been preserved for us. Let us equip ourselves and condition our minds to read and enjoy this ancient heritage.

P. N. APPUSWAMI

ON TEENAGE LOVE

There are three sections under the head 'love'—in relation to the three kings of the Tamil country. The love is not mutual, or reciprocal, or reciprocated love ; but is unilateral, and unrequited. The object of such love is the king, who may be totally unaware of its existence in the immature minds of his young subjects.

'Teen-age love' is a common enough phenomenon universally, both in time and space. For today too, we find that teenage girls go shrieking mad, almost shamelessly, over their heroes,—actors, cinema stars, sportsmen, and even knaves and villains, black or white, ugly or handsome. Teenage boys, too, go crazy over film actresses, chorus girls, advertisement and artists' models, bathing beauties, and pin-up lovelies. So there is nothing inherently improbable in the adolescent girls of the city falling in love with the king riding in the streets of the city in all his pomp and glory. All the same, it looks as though the poet sometimes ovesteps his licence, and allows his imagination (and that of the teenage girls) to take the bit between the teeth. In some of the poems he lets (or makes) the girls dwell lingeringly and even reminiscently (wholly imaginary picture), on the carnal aspects of such imagined and emotional states. In such poems, the poetic conceits andtheirartistic and varied expression is what matters and the grosser part may be ignored.

ON THE ENGLISH RENDERING

The rendering here given is not a close word-for-word translation. Such a rendering would not only be impossible on account of the differences in idiom and expression, but will also defeat its own purpose, namely, to make the reader accept and enjoy an old classic. One example will make this clear. *Kur-ilai-vel* is an epithet used in the work to describe the weapon of a warrior king. Literally rendered, it would become 'sharp-leaf-lance', and would not help the reader, and would make the poet look incoherent. So, the attempt has rather been to make the rendering a close and understandable paraphrase, without too much change or dilution. Adjectives and adverbs have been added here and there, though they may not have been in the original, in order to convey the poet's idea better, and to make his meaning clearer.

In the original poem each verse is of four lines. The first three lines have four metrical feet in each, and the fourth line has three, making a total of fifteen feet. The translator could not capture the brevity and yet keep the expressiveness. In the translation each poem has lengthened out, and its general length is between ten and fifteen lines. This translation was done over thirty-five years ago, and lay neglected. It was revised in response to a suggestion made by Sri M. Srinivasan, and is now published. The translator offers his thanks to Sri M. Srinivasan and his apologies to both the unknown poet, and the unknown reader, and hopes to be forgiven.

TOPICS

1. Invocation
2. Country
3. City
4. Enemies' Country
5. Tribute
6. Elephantry
7. Battlefield
8. Fame
9. Love

(This is the classification found in *Purattirattu*. We have no means of knowing what sequence was followed in the original poem).

MUTTOLLAYIRAM

1
INVOCATION

Of the All-Highest
Who first created
The multitudinous stars and planets
The moon, the fiery sun,
And all else besides,
A heedless world
Fenced in by the rolling ocean wave,
In after times,
Surprisingly declares again and again,
He was born
Under the star Ardra !
He was born
Under the star Ardra !

[1]

Note : The number given in square brackets at the end of each verse indicates its number in the anthology **Purattirattu** published by the University of Madras.

Ardra is the sixth lunar asterism in Hindu astronomy. It is identified with Betelgeux, the bright red star in the constellation Orion the Hunter. It is more than twentyfive million times bigger than the sun, and is about one hundred and ninety light-years away from us. It is associated with Siva—one of the gods of the Hindu Trinity. There are many myths and legends about him which are widely believed, but which, however, vary very much in detail.

PART I

PANDYA KINGS

Names and appellations occurring in the poems

1. Am-potiyir-koman
2. Chezhiyan
3. Korkai-k-koman
4. Kutalar-mannan
5. Kutalar -koman
6. Kutal-koman
7. Kutal-peruman
8. Maduraiyar-koman
9. Ma-k-katum-ko
10. Maran
11. Panchavan
12. Seleka-vannan
13. Tamizhar-peruman
14. Tennan
15. Tennavan
16. Tennavar-koman
17. Vaiyaiyar-koman
18. Vazhuti

2

SO MANY PEARLS !

Here, in our land
Ruled by the Southern King
On whose white umbrella
Festooning strings of pearl
Shimmer bright,
Fresh laid eggs
Of the conch,
Globular buds
Of mastwood trees,
And tender flower buds
Of young and bowery areca-palms,—
All lie strewn together,
And in their shining glory
Seem like lustrous pearls.

[830]

The white umbrella is in Indian tradition like the globe and sceptre, a symbol of the king's suzerainty and of his beneficence.

THE SLIPPERY STREETS

When young women,
Offended with their lovers,
Petulantly
Toss into the streets
The offered sandal paste
And coloured saffron,
They form such slippery mires
That men slither and fall
In the heart of Kudal
The Southern King's
City of lofty mansions.

[864]

Sandal and saffron are beauty aids, and may be said to roughly correspond to powder and scent.

1. Smearing the body with red saffron and fragrant sandal paste was a keep-cool habit in the warm south country.

2. Kudal is one of the literary names of the city of Madurai.

4

THE OWL SINGS A LULLABY

In those lofty mansions
Where victorious kings
Wearing gay chaplets
Of fragrant sirissa flowers,
Once sat enthroned in regal state,
And where joy reigned supreme,
The horned owl
Now hoots his doleful lullaby
To horrible goblins
In the land of those
Who did not bow
To the commands
Of the Southern King.

[1281]

1. **Sirissa**—Technically, the tree is known as albizzia. It is a moderate to large sized deciduous tree with fragrant, yellowish flowers.

2. **Goblin**—Every nation has its superstitions, and its spirit worlds. In India the spirits have no palpable bodies and yet have all the characteristics of the humans. Generally, they are evil, and their habits are vile, and they are nocturnal.

5

THE PITY OF IT

When they failed to pay
In due form and mode
Their tribute to the Pandya,
Lord of murderous war-elephants
And of resounding war-drums,
Their goodly land
Was, step by step,
Bereft of well-fed cattle,
And of lovely women,
And of manly men,
Until, alas—
It has now become
A secure home
For goblin mother and child.

[1282]

3. The term used in the original to denote the Pandya king is Panchavar, which means 'The Five', since the Pandyan kings claimed to belong to the clan of the Pandavas, who were five in number.

6

EVEN THE CELESTIALS DARE NOT

His mighty shoulders uphold
His sovereign sway ;
Gleaming strands of pearl
Shine upon his chest ;
His white umbrella
Is both wide and tall.
By the imperial decree
Of that Southern King
The earth is inviolable
By even the feet
Of the celestial gods
Whose eyes never close
And who wear golden jewels
Set with priceless rubies.

[1286]

1. The celestial gods who live in heaven have eyes that are always open, and never close or wink, and they wear garlands of flowers which never fade ; and their feet never touch the earth.
2. Lines 1 and 2 have also been interpreted to mean 'He carries the earth on his shoulders'.
3 In ancient India rubies seem to have been more valued than diamonds.

THEIR RUSE

When the royal umbrella
Of Maran, who wears
Garlands of blue lilies,
Arose like the full moon,
High over his elephant's back,
The princes of the earth
Came near, crying,
'Pray receive our tribute,
O sovereign lord !' ;
But the princely crowd
Was jammed so thick
That they could gain no access :
And so, they cried out,
'Justice ! O we seek justice !

[1287]

The princes, perhaps, feared that any delay might be construed as unwillingness to pay tribute, and that they might be visited with punishment. Since a cry for justice always gained for one immediate access to the king, they resorted to this ruse to approach and to pay. However, the meaning is not clear, and might simply mean that they cried or meant to say, 'Is this fair ?'

IGNOMINIOUS AND YET FUMING

When the war-drums
Of Maran, who wages
Angry and fierce war,
Wielding his war-lance
Which flashes fire,
Reverberate like peals of thunder,
The enemy kings flee
Beyond the lovely hill-slopes
Where wild cows gambol and leap ;
And there they lie in hiding
With bitter resentment
Gnawing at their vitals,
And their noble forms
Meanly altered.

[1331]

ARE THEY TOUCHSTONES ?

When the war-elephants
Of those who dared to oppose
Maran,
Whose lances gleam in serried rows,
Reared in fright,
And broke their saddle straps
As he charged,
The mounted kings
Toppled down from their backs ;
Right in front of his army's van ;
And the hoofs of his steeds
As they trod on their crowns
Glinted and sparkled
Like gold-flecked touchstones

[1380]

10

THE EARTH IS OURS

With his tusks
For writing styles,
And the broad chests,
Where beauty dwells,
Of enemy kings
Whose spears flash
With deadly power,
For scrolls to write upon,
The war-elephant of Maran
Of the mighty spear,
Whose blade is like a leaf,
Seems to write,
'This earth entire
Fertile and fair
Is indeed ours'.

[1390]

1. Writing style and scroll—Ancient nations developed their own writing materials. Papyrus and reed, parchment and brush or quill, paper and pen, rock and chisel, are some of them. In South India they used scrolls of dried and trimmed palm-leaf as paper, and sharp pointed iron styles as pens to scratch the letters with. (A version of this poem was published in 'Indian Literature').
2. Line 4—which strike terror in those who look at them is another interpretation.

11

THE TWO TUSKS

Increasing
Is the loveliness
Of the war-elephant
Of the Southern king
Who wears shapely garlands.
Consider the work
That its two tusks do.
While one tusk ploughs
The broad chests of those foemen
Who stand up to the king in battle,
The other tusk
Rips a passage open
Through the ramparts
Of his besieged enemies.

[1391]

Line 5 may also mean 'who wears garlands which strike terror'. Pandya's garland of neem-flowers strike terror (according to mythical beliefs) in the hearts of goblins. Or, if 'garland' means the garland which, conventionally, an attacker is supposed to wear, it strikes terror into foemen's hearts, for it means that no quarter will be given.

12

HIS ELEPHANT

It looms like a mountain ;
And trumpets like the sea ;
While its must pours like rain :
Oh ! Its sudden rush
Is swifter than a gale's :
Its ferocity is such
That death himself
Has often borrowed it.
That is what it is——
The elephant of our king,
Maran of the gleaming lance.

[1395]

1. Chariotry, elephantry, cavalry, and infantry, were the four traditional limbs of the armies of the Indian kings of olden days.
2. 'Must' (also called ichor) is the fluid secretion of male elephants (and camels) in a state of frenzy.

13

HIS LOST BEAUTY

When the war-elephant
Of the king of the Southern folk,
Whose lance flashes
Like a red tongue of fire,
Charged with a rush
Upon his enemy's ramparts,
His tusks were broken
By the impact.
Ashamed to show himself
In his disfigured beauty
Before his beloved mate,
He covered up the tips
Of the broken tusks
With the entrails of kings.

[1396]

Line 6 may mean 'ramparts bristling with defences'.
Line 12 a variant reading means 'with the royal umbrellas of enemy kings'.

14

FRIGHTENED JACKALS

In the fierce battle
Too awful to behold,
Bright spears flashed
And warriors fell dead.
When jackals prowling among the slain
Saw the angry set of their knitted brows
They took fright,
And howled from far and near
Upon the glorious field of battle
Where the warriors who came
Too near the sweep
Of the sword of the Southern king
Were cut down straightaway.

[1430]

Line 8 may mean according to a variant reading, 'howled from distant places', or 'howled from a distance'.

15

A PITIABLE SIGHT

When the widowed queens
Of his slain foemen
Plunged into the fire,
Garlanded Vazhuti
Was unable to bear the sight,
And covered his eyes
With the hem of his robe.
His war-elephant too,
When it saw the mates
Of his enemies' war-elephants
Lamenting with piteous moans,
Covered its eyes
On the battle-field
Where so many elephants
Had fought and died.

[1433]

Widowed queens plunging into the fire.: In olden days some widows preferred to die on the funeral pyre of their husbands, rather than live a life of cheerless widowhood. The custom was by no means universal, or compulsory. It was finally put an end to by legislation.

Lines 9-10 may mean 'tender-hearted cow-elephants'.

16

THE VANQUISHED VICTOR

When the Southern King
Whose banner floats
In the army's van
Saw the kings who had refused
To yield their domain to him
Lying couched upon elephants
Their eyes sealed in death,
And their teeth
Dug into their lips,
And the aimed lance,
Gripped tensely in their hands
And raised to eye-level,
He stood transfixed
Like one vanquished.

[1456]

Southern King—One of the names of Pandya.

17

THE ONLY MEDICINE

The wives of those
Who roused to anger
The lance of mighty Maran,
Wearer of shining garlands,
The lance which flashes fire
From its leaf-shaped blade,
Should let their innocent babes
Stand in front,
And keeping behind them
Fall at his feet,
And beg for the restoration
Of their domain.
This, they say,
Is the only way
To cure Maran's eyes
Still blood-shot with anger.

[1457]

1. Shining garlands—Because they were of pearl.

18

SONGS OF PRAISE

As we offer every day
Words of high praise
To the son of God,
Who rides upon the peacock
The range of whose flight
No barrier can impede,
And offer him *cadamba* flowers,
So we offer songs
In sweetest Tamil
In praise of Maran
The renown of whose victories
In the wars he waged
Shines for ever,
And whose spear gleams
With a myriad beams.

[1464]

1. The son of God: According to Hindu mythology, Muruga (also known as Subrahmanya, and by various other names) is the son of Siva, one of the Hindu Trinity.
2. *Cadamba*—known also as 'common cadamba' (*anthocephalus-cadamba* is a large deciduous tree with spreading branches. It bears small orange coloured flowers with globular heads.

19

FLOWERS AT HIS FEET

As the flowers
Which Arjuna, Chariot-warrior,
Strewed in worship on the Great Lord
Whose eyes are veined with red,
Were, for a wonder,
Seen to lie
Upon the Lord who rides
The white bull with sparkling eyes,
So the flowers worn
Upon the crests
Of the crowned kings of the earth
Are seen to lie
At the feet of Maran
Who wears a garland of flowers
Thronging with bees.

[1465]

1. 'Arjuna', the greatest bowman of the Bharata war, was the third of the five Pandava brothers famous in classic myth and legend. He was a chariot-warrior of the highest order.
2. 'The Great Lord' may refer to Vishnu, one of the Hindu Trinity, or to Krishna, his human counterpart on earth, born to fulfil his mission to save the virtuous and to destroy the wicked.
3. 'The Lord who rides the white bull' is Siva, another of the Hindu Trinity.

20

THE GOD IN DISGUISE

On the day
When in cowherd's guise
You slew Kesi
Who had assumed the form of a horse,
And on the day
When you danced the pot-dance,
And again when you made love
To the charming maid
Who wore bracelets of flowers,
You had a dark mole upon your chest.
O Southern Chief,
O King and chariot-warrior,
O Lord of the folk of Kudal city
Which stands beside the the limpid river,
O Tell me truly
Where and how
You have hidden it now. [1466]

1. Pandya is here identified with Krishna, and the deeds of Krishna are attributed to him.
2. Kesi was an asura (an anti-god, and a dweller of the nether world) who assumed the form of a horse to attack Krishna, but Krishna saw through his disguise and killed him.
3. The pot-dance: Krishna danced the pot-dance in the city of the Asura king, Bana, to rescue his grandson Aniruddha, who had been seized and imprisoned by that king.
4. The love episode with the maid refers to Nappinnai.
5. The dark mole refers to 'Srivatsa', the dark mole on Vishnu's chest.
6. All these have reference to a convention by which a king is regarded as God Vishnu's representative on earth.

21

IN HIS COUNTRY

Under his land
Red gold abounds,
Inside his cities
Triple-Tamil flourishes,
Within the pure waters
Of his sea
White conchs and pearls are born,
Upon his mountain slopes
Herds of elephants swarm,
And in the chests of kings
On which many a garland swayed
His keen lance-heads
Lie imbedded.

[1469]

1. Triple-Tamil — According to ancient Tamil grammarians, Tamil literature was classified under three heads, namely, prose and verse, musical composition, and drama.
2. The poet repeats the same verb in all the five contexts suggesting its several connotations in each case, and gaining also in brevity of expression. Appear, occur, happen, touch, blossom, hit, strike against, swarm, be buried, and imbedded, are some of the meanings of the verb used.

22

SNAKES AND KINGS

The dancing snake
With a five-headed hood
And a rare jewel
Upon its crest,
Hides in terror
Frightened of the peal
Of the majestic thunder of the sky.
Even so, the fair kings
Of this spacious earth,
Even in their sleep,
Dream in terror
Of the lance of wrath
Of Maran the Great,
Whose eyes are red with anger
And whose shoulders have been
Victorious in many wars.

[1470]

Five-headed snake—The five-headed cobra is a creature of Indian imagination, and figures in many lovely pieces of sculpture and in many myths and legends. The jewel on its head is another such invention. That the cobra dances to the snake-charmer's pipe is a wide-spread belief which is not true to fact, for a cobra has no external ear and cannot hear when its head is raised above the ground ; and it is very doubtful if any snake is musical, or can dance.

THIS IS A FESTIVE DAY

O foemen bold !
Fling open wide
Your fortress gates ;
And deck your war-elephants,
And your chariots of war ;
And put gayest panoply
On your prancing steeds,
And let them run free ;
For, today,
When the star *Uttarada* rules
Is the birth-day
Of our Southern King,
The lord of chariots of war.
Our chivalrous king
Will war with none today.

[1472]

1. *Uttarada* : A shortened form of *Uttarashadha*. It is the twenty-first lunar asterism according to the Hindu Calendar It is part of the constellation 'sagittarius'.

2. Lines 4-7 have also been interpreted as 'unharness them, or doff their trappings of war.'

24

KINSFOLK TO THE RESCUE

Even now
I saw the words come true,
That one's kinsfolk
Unfriendly though they had been
before
Would yet come and help
In the hour of need.
O Bright-jewelled maid,
Look !
My rare and fine-wrought
Bangles of shell
Which were beginning to slip
From my wrists
Now stay on them,
When they heard
The whorled conch
Of the king of the Vaikai folk
Come near and sound
To herald his coming.

[1506]

1. The third line may also mean 'though they had not done anything to help before'.

2. Bangles worn by women at the wrist and forearm were cut from the shell of the sea ; and the blowing conch is its near kin. Bangles which would have slipped from the thinning arms of the love-sick maid, and got broken, now stay on when the conch announced the good tidings of the king's eoming, and so were saved from slipping off and breaking.

25

THE KEYHOLE

'You must submit
To our watch and ward',
Declared my mother firmly,
Confining me within the guarded
house ;
And she ran to the door,
And closed it tight,
And pushed home the bolt.
O How can I requite
Those who drilled the keyhole
For me to peep through
And see the comely grace
Of the great Pandya King
Riding on a swift charger !

[1509]

The key holes of the old and fairly thick wooden doors were nearly three quarters of an inch across, and could be good peep-holes.

26

WALK BY MY WINDOW

Your feet are like drums,
Your ears are like leathern shields,
Your trunk swings to and fro,
Your mouth has a hanging lip,
A Cow-elephant !
When you enter our town
Ridden by him, who wears
Sweet smelling garlands of flowers,
And a paste
Of vermilion and sandal,
I beseach you,
Please walk
Close by my latticed window.

[1510]

Lines 9 and 10. The description is so general that it may apply to any one of the three kings. But at least one interpreter has included this verse among those relating to Pandya. There is no internal indication, for or against.

27

ARE YOU WOMANLY ?

Look here,
A young cow elephant !
When Maran, the king
Of our Kudal city,
Wielder of the long and goodly
spear
Encrusted with his enemies' flesh,
Goes gaily fortth
On a festal procession,
You do not seem to know
How to walk
With modest steps and slow :
So, grave doubts assail me
About your womanliness.

[1511]

28

WALK WITH GENTLE STEPS

O noble steed,
Won't you cease to gallop
As on the field of battle,
And please walk gently
With loving steps and slow
Through our town,
That we may,
Standing by our doors,
Admire and adore
The chest of Maran,
Wielder of the keen lance,
And the lord of fierce hosts
Of frenzied elephants.

[1514]

THE BELOVED DUST

O what shall I do
With the dust raised
By the hoofs of the steed
Of our royal Vazhuti,
Who wears rounded garlands
Of freshest flowers
Picked from his garden,
And who drives in a chariot of gold ?
Shall I wallow in that beloved dust ?
Or smear it on my forehead
And sprinkle it on my hair ?
Or shall I
Mix it into a paste
And with a flower petal for a brush
Draw delicate designs
Upon my breasts ? [1515]

1. Kanavattam is the term used for the royal charger. The word means 'horse'. Some take it as a proper name, the name of the king's horse par excellence.
2. Line 10—Devotees of Siva smear sacred ashes on their forehead.
3. Tire-women of olden days too, like those in beauty parlours of to-day, used paints and brushes to darken the eyelashes, to redden the tongue and the lips, and to draw and paint colourful designs of leaf and flower on the exposed breasts of glamorous women.

THE BEACON ON THE HILL

Like a lamp hidden well
Within a pot,
The love of fair maidens,
Beautiful as flowery boughs,
Never reveals itself.
But when Vazhuti goes forth
Wearing flower garlands
Their love blazes bright
For all the world
To talk about
As bright as a beacon of fire
Lit upon a glorious hill
In the evening time
When the grazing kine return.

[1516]

31

WHEN WATCHMAN TURNS ROBBER

When Maran came
Into our unoffending street,
I bowed before him ;
But he robbed me
Of the beauty of my shoulders too.
Since it is he
Who watches over those
Who dwell in Korkai city
By the dark blue ocean
Where the billows roar,
To whom now
Can I complain ?

[1519]

1. My shoulders too—The suggestion is that he had robbed her of her heart as well.
2. Korkai—It was an ancient city which lay at the mouth of River Tamraparni. It was a famous sea-port of olden days mentioned in the accounts of foreign travellers even before the Christian era. It was famous for its off-shore pearl fisheries. But since then, sand has invaded the sea, and the place unrecognisably ruined is now a few miles inland.

32

WHY DOES HE DISCRIMINATE ?

If it is his duty
To protect all who live
Upon the earth,
And if among those earthly lives
Mine too is counted as one,
Is it meet of sceptered Cezhiya
Whose rule is ever just,
To discriminate thus
Against me alone ?
Wouldn't it be
Like water flowing
From a feeding breast
Instead of
A flowing stream of milk ?

[1521]

The meaning of the last line in the original verse, which corresponds to the last four lines here and seems to have been a proverb, is not clear.

33

WHO IS THERE TO REPROVE HIM ?

He is the guardian king
Whose royal umbrella
Holds sole supremacy.
And the entire earth
Is under his watch and ward ;
While poor I
Am but a trifling thing,
A lone and helpless
Feminine creature.
If Maran who wears
Garlands, moist and cool,
Will not deign
To look on me with grace,
Who is there to reprove him
By telling him,
'Nay, this is not right ?'

[1523]

The last seven lines have been differently interpreted.

THE EMPTY BEDSIDE

The Southern King ;
Lord of frenzied elephants,
Came to me
In a dream ;
And I thought
That he had favoured me
With his gracious love.
In a daze
And still drowsy with sleep,
I groped for him
At my bedside
Feeling with my fingers
As delicately soft and red
As glory-lily flowers.
Alas !
What was there for me to see
Except myself ?

[1528]

35

THE REWARD OF PENANCE

Is it the merit
Of the penance done
By the fragrant blue lilies,
Dark as rain-clouds,
By standing through the live-long day
In the cold waters
Of the scented pool,
That now they have
The good fortune
Of being taken and worn
By Vazhuti,
Wielder of the sharp-headed lance,
Rider of galloping horses,
And wearer of garlands
Whose blossoms' smiles
Invite the bees
To come and stay ? [1529]

Lines 2 and 5 to 7 — Penances are practices of self-mortification whose aim is to please the gods and obtain boons from them. Standing up to the neck in cold water in mid-winter, and in the midst of several fires in mid-summer are two of the severest penances. Uma (Parvati), the daughter of the mountains is described by Kalidas as having performed the penances to win the heart of Siva, whom she loved, but whom she could not win by all the glamour of her beauty, even though she had the God of Love as her ally.

WHO WILL TELL ME HOW ?

I am just a helpless woman.
Will anyone who knows
Tell me how
I may go and meet,
Some day or other,
The lord of the people
Of Madura city,
Where the waves of the river
Move to and fro
And chafe against the storied
mansions,
Walking, if I have to,
Over the heads
Of the dense throngs of those
Who so closely surround him ?

[1530]

1. Lines 6 & 7. Refer to the Pandyan king.
2. Lines 11 & 14. The meaning is not clear. 'Over the heads' perhaps means 'avoiding the strict watch'.

WHY THEN DO THEY PINE ?

Upon my arms lie
Bangles made from the conchs
Which dwelt in his sea ;
What I wear as jewels
Are glistening pearls
Born of the goodly oysters
Which abound there ;
Upon my body
Lies the paste
Of the sandal which grew
On lofty Potiyil Hill
Of Maran who wields the deadly lance
And wages wars with kings.
What then do my shoulders miss
That they droop and pine ?

[1534]

1. The clinking bangles which women wore were cut from the conch of the sea.
2. Potiyil Hill—also known as Potiyam, a mountain of the Western Ghats, in the Pandya country, famous as the abode of Agastya. See note to verse 51.

38

THE DILEMMA

If I am immodest
And gaze at him
The fair name of my womanhood
Would be lost ;
But if I do not press forward
To see him
The bangles will slip
From my thinning arms.
Alas ! I see no way
To ease my heart-ache—
My heart longs
To gaze at Vazhuti
Who rides a galloping steed
And wears garlands
Whose flowers allay
The hunger of honey bees.

[1535]

THE USELESS LOVELINESS

What does it matter
If my breasts are
As luscious and beautiful
As the fruits
Of the tall and stately palm,
If they do not pick up
With their tip and base
The paste of sandal
Worn on the jewelled chest
Of the Southern King
Who rides an elephant
Whose tusks are sharp ?

[1536]

1. Lines 6-10 use a metaphor which has reference to bulls and heifers butting in sheer *joy de vivre* at mud walls or mounds of earth and going along with some of the mud sticking to their horns, from the tip down to the base.

TROUBLE BOTH WAYS

If I dive and plunge
In the waters of his river
And bathe with delight
They rail at me ;
And if I do not,
Still they cry,
'She seeks to hide,
Her love for him'.
O friend ! Your eyes flash bright
Like gleaming spears !
The cool waters of the Vaigai
Of Maran who rides a fierce elephant
Are full of trouble for me,
Whatever I may do.

[1537]

1. The Vaigai is the river which flows by the side of Madurai. The modern city is now on both the banks of the river, while in olden times it seems to have been only on one side.

GEOMANTIC CIRCLES

'Do link up, O looping rings,
If I should hold
In love's embrace
The lord of Kudal city,
The king of the people
Who dwell in Kudal'.
Thus she spoke
And made as if to draw
The linking circles close ;
But of a truth
She drew them not.
For she knew
That should she fail
So would
Her expectations too.

[1538]

Linking Circles—Looping rings : A local and ancient variant of 'He loves me,he loves me not !' People who are down on their luck and hope for better times, resort to divination and seek to know the future. In this particular case, continuous looping rings are drawn in a circle on the sand with the finger, or on hard ground, with white or coloured powder. If the end loops meet properly and link together, and are even, they augur well, and end in lovers' meeting.

42

TELL HIM JUST THIS

Do not tell him
Of my father ;
No, nor reveal my name ;
Do not tell him
Of my city ;
Nor tell him
Who my mother is ;
But say just this to him,
The hard-hearted lord
Of the Tamil folk,
The lord of elephant hosts
Whose red-hot temper never cools,
That in his city
There dwells a girl
Whose eyes do not close in sleep.

[1540]

43

WAS MY MOTHER NEVER YOUNG?

O, Tell me, dear friend,
Your eyes flash like gleaming swords,
And on your long and lovely arms
Golden bracelets fondly nestle
Tell me,
Was my mother never young at all
Before she ever grew old?
For, now she tells me
'No ! Do not look at him ;
Do not set your eyes on Maran
Who wears garlands of flowers
Just breaking into blossom,
Whose armies overrun
His foemen's domain,
And whose lance's tip
Is aglow with his valour's fire'.

[1542]

44

THE SONG OF THE PESTLE

Singing of his banner,
Singing of his battle-car,
Singing of the glorious crown
Of Maran who wears
Cool garlands of fresh-culled flowers,
And singing too
Of his necklet of pearl,
Shall I have the joy
O[illegible] the pestle
With golden bands
In my little home,
Since I am kept
Under the rare and zealous guard
Of my mother ?

[1543]

Cosmetic powder fragrant and coloured is hand-pounded with pestle and mortar by women who sing as they work. In fact, singing seems to have been part of every kind of labour, e.g. cartmen, drawers of water, boatmen, have their own songs. A famous song of the pestle occurs in *Silappatikaram* (The Lay of the Anklet).

45

THE BIRD HAS FLOWN

She does not know
That my eager heart
Has already gone forth
To clasp in close embrace
The king of Kudal
On whose environs stand
Coconut palms
With clustering fruit :
But like a bird trapper
Guarding an empty cage
Unaware that his captive quail
Has flown away,
My mother too
Guards in vain
My body's empty shell.

[1546]

Empty shell—The suggestion is that the mother guards an empty body from which the heart has flown long ago in quest of the king's love

WHY SHOULD I LOSE ?

It is but just
That those who scorned
The Southern King,
Lord of frenzied elephant hosts,
Thinking that the prince
Is a mere stripling,
And so did not
Bend their knee in submission,
Should lose their fair domain :
But why should I
Who worshipped with folded hands
His beautiful and jewelled chest,
Why should I lose
My lovely complexion
Fair as the new sprouts
Fresh and tender
Of the fragrant mango ?

[1548]

Fresh and tender mango sprouts are a favourite simile in Tamil for a fair maid's complexion as roses are in English.

47

MY UNHELPFUL EYES

Imagining my dream
To be the real thing
My eyes met his boldly
When he looked at me :
But when I was really awake
And stood before him,
They were too shy
To meet his gaze.
O Friend,
How lovely are the jewels you wear !
If this is how
My eyes will behave
How can I ever hope
To find favour,
In lordly Maran's eyes ?

[1549]

Lines 9 and 10 — They are partly a flattering approach to secure more sympathy, and they also provide a pause to overcome her hesitancy in giving expression to her thoughts.

48

HE SHALL NOT ESCAPE

O Dear mother,
How fresh are the blossoming flowers
Of the garlands you wear !
Though my life may be the forfeit
I will not remove my hands
With which I have sealed mine eyes,
And let you peep within ;
For Maran, that heartless prince,
The stealer of my bangles,
The wielder of the sword,
He came riding a frenzied elephant
In the night,
And entered the citadal of my eyes ;
And I will never, never,
Let him escape from there.

[1550]

Lines 1 to 3 — The same flattering approach as in the previous verse, and a hesitant prelude to a confession.

49

UNDESERVING I

At last, somehow,
My weary eyelids closed,
And just then it seemed to me
That Maran,
Wielder of the sharp lance,
Came near me
And clasped me by the hand.
I thought it was real,
And so,
I rose up in haste ;
But alas !
I was undeserving,
For I never had
A single good deed to my credit
And by my waking
I lost
Even my dream.

[1551]

Line 8—Alternative interpretation — Oh ! This is the realisation of the impossible.

MY HEART WAITS FOR A REPLY

Climbing up
On to a high sand-dune,
From the shelving shore
Battered by the waves of the sea,
The oyster
Which has just given birth
To a shining pearl,
Crawls away a little
And lies exhausted,
Eagerly awaiting
An incoming wave
To re-enter the haven of the sea.
My heart, likewise,
Awaits the coming
Of a reply to my message
From the lord
Of Southern Korkai.

[1556]

Lord of Korkai — one of the titles of Pandyan Kings. Korkai was a seaport in ancient times and famous for its pearl fisheries. It is now about three miles inland, the sand having invaded the sea. The simile seems somewhat strained. See foot-note to verse 31.

51

LOST THROUGH LOVE

Please, will you
O cold north wind,
Remind the king
Who wages deadly wars
Against his foes,
Will you please remind him
Of his royal umbrella
Which is like a moon,
And of his upright sceptre too ?
For I have lost my bangles
Through my love
For the lord of lovely Pothiyil Hill,
Where those who cook their food
Feed the fire
With twigs of sandal.

[1558]

1. The royal umbrella symbolises both the king's sovereignty and his beneficent care for the welfare of his subjects.
2. The sceptre symbolises his authority and his just and upright rule.
3. Loss of bangles, through slipping from wasted arms, indicates her lovelorn condition.
4. Potiyil Hill—a section of the Western Ghats in the Pandyan Kingdom is one of the homes of the sandalwood tree. See note to verse 37.

LIKE AN ARROW-STRIKEN DOE

Even as a gentle doe
Standing broken hearted
Upon the crumbling ford
Near a water hole
Draws back a little
To let some animals go in
And shrinks her body
To let others come out
And seeks to hide
From those who scoff at her,
So too does my smitten heart
Which has gone after
The lord of the people of Kudal,
Stand, hurt and helpless.

[1559]

1. The parallelism of the love stricken maid to the striken doe, is to her being stricken with cupid's dart, and to her utter helplessness.

53

THE ANGRY NORTH WIND

As the birth-day comes round
Boding disaster
To those who lie
Critically ill in bed,
Eevn so,
O Jewelled maid !
In the desolate evening time
When he does not clasp me,
He, Maran Vazhuti,
Whose elephant wears a clanging bell,
A gust of the cold north wind
Comes hissing with anger
And I am so scared.

[1560]

1. Birthday : It is an astrological belief that a patient's condition worsens on certain days, like birthdays, new-moon days, and the like, and on those days his condition may become critical.
2. Line 9—Maran Vazhuti—The Pandyan King's name is mentioned twice over lovingly and caressingly.

54

THE IMPEDING MODESTY

When he, Maran,
The conqueror of foes
In open battles murderously waged,
Is not by my side,
I intend to say to him
A thousand, thousand loving things ;
But when I meet him face to face,
I wonder,
If I shall ever be able to say
'O Give me, pray,
Your jewelled chest' ;
And if I shall
Realise the delight
Of his close embrace ?
Alas ! Why was I born
With Modesty as my twin ?

[1563]

THE NIGHT'S DILEMMA

Those who do not hold him
In close embrace
Cry, 'Come quick, O Dawn !' ;
But those who fondly clasp him
In love's embrace,
Cry, 'Stay, O Night ! and linger long !'.
How handsome is the chest,
White with sandal-paste,
Of Maran, who wears garlands
Woven of a medley of flowers !
So the night
Is both cursed
And blessed too.

[1565]

Lines 11-13. Cleverly and with skill, the poet has used the same verb to express two opposite ideas, namely, to indicate that the night is blessed to some, and cursed to others. Or if we accept a variant reading, the lines may mean 'This is how the night passed'.

TEARS ARE PEARLS

Lustrous pearls
Do not spring in abundance
From Korkai's shores alone,
Nor are they all
Oyster born ;
For they spring too in plenty
From the eyes of those
Who fondly dote
On the broad chest,
Cool with paste of sandal,
Of Korkai's lord,
Maran, who wields
A blood stained spear.

[1566]

57

PETULANT SULKING

When I sulked in petulance,
He tried to pacify me ;
And when I took no heed
And rejected his overtures,
He was peeved :
And then, later,
I tried to appease him.
But he took no heed.
This is how
The whole night passed
Without my nestling close
At the beautiful chest
Painted with paste of sandal,
Of Vazhuti,
Wearer of garlands
Of fresh-culled flowers
Which are springs of nectar.

[1569]

MUTTOLLAYIRAM

PART II

CHOZHA KINGS

Names and appellations occurring in the poems

1. Chenni
2. Chempian
3. Chozhan
4. Kaviri-nir-natan
5. Killi
6. Ko-k-killi
7. Kozhi-k-Koman
8. Nalam-killi
9. Pukar-p-peruman
10. Punal-natan
11. Punal-nir-natan
12. Uraintaiyar-ko
13. Valavan

58

THE JOYFUL SHOUT

Ploughmen watching the corn
Upon the threshing ground
Climb upon the mounded sheaves
And raise a joyful shout.
'Naavalo !' they cry
In the fair domain
Of King Killi,
Lord of goodly elephant hosts ;
And their shout
Falls upon the ears of enemy kings
Like the triumphant whoop
Of the God of Death
From upon the lofty backs
Of the fierce war-elephants
Of the king. [831]

1. Naavalo—a joyful or challenging cry, often referred to in ancient poems, but which has gone completely out of vogue.

2. Lines 11-12. The meaning is not quite clear. It my be a shout by the warriors to invite the God of Death to the battle field for a feast, or for a survey, or to play his deadly part. Or again it may mean that the God of Death himself rejoices at the slaughter wrought by the victorious King, and that he shouts with a disembodied voice. Or again it may be that one of the king's warriors has been personified to represent the God of Death.

59

A RAINBOW ON THE GROUND

Flower sellers in the streets,
Who vend woven garlands
In the evening,
Pinch and throw aside
Defective blossoms.
These discarded flowers make
Such a delightful medley,
That in the morning after,
In the heart of lovely Urantai,
The city of victorious Valava,
It seems to the eye
Like a rainbow
On the ground.

[863]

1. Urantai—is Uraiyur, the inland Capital (now part of Trichinopoly) of the Chola kingdom.

THE OWL'S LULLABY

The tender babe
With soft, rose-hued feet,
And soles marked with tiny lines,
Which the fleeing women
Gave birth to
In the wild
Upon a bed of fallen leaves,
Is lulled to sleep
By the hoot of the moping owl
In the middle night —
There, in the land of those
Who refused to honour
Chembian's royal name.

[1280]

Chembian—is one of the names or titles of Chozha kings, who claim their descent from Sibi, famous in myth and legend as the king who cut off his flesh piece by piece to save a dove from a pursuing falcon.

61

WAIT A LITTLE

Tarry awhile,
O mighty kings,
Who have come to pay
Your due tribute.
But yesterday,
A host of kings
So rushed to him
With bended heads
To lay their dues
At his dainty feet,
That their jewelled crowns
Have chafed them raw.
Racked with pain,
And indisposed,
He receives none
In audience today —
He, the king
Of us who dwell
In our fair city of Urantai
Broad and cool.

[1288]

62

A SHIP WITH SAILS UNFURLED

Dashing against the fortress gates
Studded with spikes of steel,
And trampling on them ;
And holding aloft
Impaled upon his charging tusks
The citadel doors
Of kings of renowned might,
The war-elephant
Of Killi, our king
Whose lance flames in anger,
Seems like a ship
With crowded sails
Upon an ice-cold sea.

[1389]

63

THE GLORIOUS DISFIGUREMENT

His tusks broken
By repeated charging
Against the bannered ramparts
Of the foe,
His toe nails worn off
By frequent stubbing
Against the crowned heads of kings ;
The war-elephant of Killi,
Whose shoulders are firm as a rock,
Stands outside his stall,
Ashamed to appear
In his disfigurement
Before his beloved mate.

[1392]

HOW IT COMES !

With a single mighty tread
Trampling Kanchi down ;
And with another
Trampling down cool Unchai
Where the rippling waters
Splash on the shore ;
And then again,
With one more tread
Trampling Eezham down ;
Thus comes striding
The war-elephant
Of our King Killi
Lord of Uraiyur City.

[1393]

1. Kanchi — Conjeevaram (Kanchipuram) a famous temple city near Madras.
2. Unchai — Ujjain, a city up in the north, famous as the plaçe where Kalidasa flourished
3. Eezham — Ceylon (Lanka as it is now known).
4. Uraiyur — is now part of the city of Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappalli), an inland capital of Chozha Kings.

WHNE HIS ELEPHANT GOES FORTH

Flights of vultures
Scream aloud ;
Hovering kites
Follow all along its way ;
Scurrying jackals
Run in every direction ;
Goblin maids
Decked with garlands
Dance the *Alangalam* measure ;
Whenever the war-elephant
Of Killi, who wields
The gleaming spear with leaf-like tip
Goes striding forth.

[1394]

1. *Alangalam* — a swaying devil-dance.

THE GOBLINS' LAMPS

Into the white skulls
Of heads which once wore a crown,
Pouring the brain matter
For burning oil,
And sticking the stout entrails
For lamp wicks,
The goblins light,
One by one,
Many a flaming lamp
In festive joy
Upon the battle-plain
Whereon Chembian
Had fought.

[1432]

67

THE SHADE'S SANCTUARY

With the Mandara mountain
For its stick,
And the sapphire sky
For its canopy of leaf,
And the orb of the full moon
For a unique central disc,
The royal umbrella
Of King Killi,
Ever victorious in war,
Affords its shade's sanctuary
To every nook and corner
Of the entire earth
Girt by the waters of the sea.

[1468]

1. Mandara—a mythical mountain, one of the eight by which the world was supported ; or, it may be a synonym for Mount Meru, the lofty Mountain of Gold round which, according to mythology, the sun and moon revolved.
2. Umbrella—the age old umbrella of the south had a central stick of bamboo, and a canopy or top, of plaited leaves of screw-pine. The royal umbrella symbolises sovereignty and protection. Even today white umbrellas can be seen in the processions of Gods in some parts of the country.

THE LONE UNFORTUNATE

On this festive day
When the star *Revati* rules,
Revati, the birth star
Of our lord King Killi,
Who wields a spear
Whose tip is like a gleaming leaf,
Pious Brahmins
Receive gifts
Of cows and gold ;
And sweet-tongued bards
Ride upon the backs
Of stately elephants
Huge as Mandara Hill.
But tell me why
Upon this happy day
The poor spider alone
Has to lose
Even her home
A tenuous web. [1473]

1. *Revati*—is the twenty seventh lunar asterism, and is part of the constellation 'Pisces' (*Meenam* according to Hindu astronomy).
2. House painting (white washing) is a festive 'spring cleaning', and all cobwebs are swept off.
3. *Mandara*—See note to verse 67.

69

FLING THE DOORS OPEN

Fling the doors wide open !
And let any evil
That may result
Be left over
For it would be calamitous indeed
If any young women
Should die of disappointment.
Fling the doors wide open
That their eyes may dwell
With dear delight
Upon Urantai's King,
Wearer of cool garlands
Upon his chest,
The noble chieftain of the Tamil folk.

[507]

'Of disappointment' in line 6 is an explanatory addition.

UNWOMANLY

Though King Valava
Who wears long garlands
Of blue lilies,
Is seated upon your back,
You walk with, immodest haste,
O cow-elephant !
You have not a trace
Of the modest deportment
Of the women
Of the land of the Kaviri
Where the banking clouds in the sky
Seem like long stretches
Of blue lilies.

[1512]

---

1. Kaviri—(Cauveri)—the famous river of the South, famous in myth and legend as flowing from Sage Agastya's pot, or alternatively as the daughter of King Kavera, and lovingly referred to as the 'golden river'.
2. Lines 1—13—have a variant reading which means 'where, the blue lilies blossom like maidens' eyes'.

71

EYES AT EVERY LATTICED WINDOW

When Chozha
Wielder of the gleaming spear
Whose blade is like a leaf,
Went promenading the city
Riding upon his horse Patala,
In full view of fair maidens
Who wear bangles of gold,
Those maidens' eyes
Flashed from every latticed window
Like shoals of entrapped carps
Sparkling and gleaming
From within the linked meshes
Of a net of blue.

[1513]

Patala — the name of the royal steed of the Chola King.

72

UNJUST JUSTICE

It was my kohl-tipped eyes
Which gazed fondly on him,
Is was my good heart
Which mingled with his
Again and again.
But mark !
It is my shoulders
So plump and soft
Which have been punished.
This my friend,
Is what Valava of Uraiyur
Who drives in state
In the promenade of the King's highway
Has done to me.
To him
Everything seems right.

[1520]

Kohl—is a black unguent applied to the eyelashes to make them darker.

73

MORE THAN HIS DUE

My fond heart,
My maiden modesty,
My fair loveliness,
All, all of these
Has he, the king
Of this well-watered land
Robbed from me.
It is surprising,
Beloved friend,
How shapely are your hips,
And how very broad
Like the outspread hood of a snake !
Tell me now ;
Are not a king's dues
No more than a sixth.

[1522]

1. Well-watered land—used as a proper name for the Chozha kingdom.
2. King's dues—According to the law of the land as laid down by the Codes of Law, the king is entitled to one-sixth of the income from any source.
3. Lines 9-12. A piece of flattery, and a bashful pause to pick up enough courage to ask the question.

74

THE TARNISHED SCEPTRE

When I dream of him
My eyes are closed
In sleep, and so
They do not let me see him ;
And when I meet him
When I am awake,
My eyes avert themselves
Out of maiden modesty.
They have dented and tarnished
The upright sceptre
Of the lord of Pukar city
Whose fleets of fast ships
Cleave through the waves
Of the ocean swell.

[1524]

1. Tarnished sceptre—because the king has not punished the misbehaving eyes.
2. Pukar—an ancient name for Kaviripattinam (old Kaviri-p-poom-pattinam) famous as the sea port capital of Chozha Kings, and in literature as the city of Kovalan, Kannaki and Madhavi, in the Tamil Classic Silappadaikaram (The Lay of the Anklet).

75

I TOO SHALL PROCLAIM

When I meet him
Face to face
Upon the long highway
Where he presents himself,
Won't I proclaim
That all his army would know
The manner of his sceptre's rule,
Of him who ran off
With my garment,
He, Killi
Who wears cool garlands,
And with a lavish hand,
Generous and strong,
Gives away
Elephant bulls and cows ?

[1525]

Lines 8 and 9—Refer to a dream she dreamt.

76

IS HE A PROTECTOR ?

They say that Chenni
The young Valava,
Wearer of garlands
Of fragrant flowers
Which grow on limpid waters,
Is the protector
Of the spacious earth :
But if he is really
The protector
Of the spacious earth,
Wouldn't he have protected me
From the notes of the reed-pipes
Which cowherd swains
Put against their lips
At evening time ?

[1526]

Reed Pipes—In conventional description of the evening young cowherd swains are described as evoking sweet strains of music from reed of bamboo pipes, which make it harder for parted lovers and lovesick maids to bear their malady.

77

THE FRAUD EXPOSED

To the beat of drums
Killi's war-elephant goes forth,
And upon the king's chest
Garlands sway,
And people declare
That he always does the right :
But, my friend
Wouldn't my lovely, fine-wrought bangles
Slipping from my wrists,
Wouldn't they proclaim
How righteous in real fact
Is his sceptre's rule ?

[1527]

1. The note of sarcasm is obvious.
2. Slipping bangles—the suggestion is that he has robbed her of those from her lovesick wasted arms.

FALSELY CHARGED

My mother chases me
With a minatory stick,
And our neighbours
Wring my heart
With stinging words
That hurt me sore.
As the poor toad
Is falsely charged
With sucking the tender fruit
Of the coconut palm
Whose fronds are long and narrow,
So too am I falsely blamed
With regard to Valava
Who drives on a mighty chariot.

[1531]

1. Chases—the original may mean 'beats'; but one would not like to think mothers beat their adolescent ch ldren with sticks.
2. Toad—coconut fruits sometimes develop a blight in which the pulp and the mi k perish inside the coconut shell, and popular superstition puts the blame on the poor innocent toad.
3. Line 10 may mean the coconut fruit catches the blight while yet not fully grown (an analogy to the maid's adolescence).

79

I HAVE NOT SEEN HIM WELL

When I sulked in petulance
I turned my back on him ;
When he held me close
My looks were cast down
In bashful shyness ;
In love's embrace
My senses reeled in joy,
And I did not see him.
This is how
I have never yet seen
To my eyes' content
Sceptred Valava
Who rules over a land
where · prosperity ever dwells.

[1533]

TELL HIM OF MY MALADY

O Young and artless
Red-footed stork !
I lay my hands upon your feet,
And I pray you,
If you go
To southern Uraiyur,
Won't you please tell
The king of the land
Watered by the Kaviri
Where the flouncing fish
Knock against the fertile banks,
Won't you tell him of the malady
Which ails me ?

[1539]

1. Line 3. This is a very respectful method of saluting elders. It is a token of utter submission.
2. Lines 8-9. The Chola Kingdom

A MIRAGE INDEED

In that innocent age
When I lisped as a child
My mother said to me,
'You shall be the bride
Of the King of Kozhi city.'
Alas ! Gone are those times now ;
And look now
At what has happened.
It lies revealed
As the false allure
Which the rippling water
Of a mirage
In a vast desert
Holds out to innocent deer.

[1544]

Kozhi — a name of Uraiyur the inland capital of the Chola Kings, so named because of a legend that a cock fought an elephant on that spot and won in the fight.

LIKE A FLAME LIT ON THE WATER

When I looked at
The battle-worthy shoulders
Of Chembiyan,
Wearer of swaying garlands,
I warned the girls
And told them,
'Do not go and look at him' :
But in the ears of those
Fond foolish maidens,
Who, now sick with love
Have lost their beauty,
And whose body
Is covered over
With a pale and sickly hue,
The colour of a ribbed gourd flower,
My futile words fell
Like a flame on the water.

[1545]

1. The flower of the ribbed gourd is a pallid yellow colour—the colour conventionally attributed to love - sickness.
2. The last line may mean that the attempt was as futile as the attempt to light a fire with water for oil.

83

MY PETULANT SULK

My friend,
You are as lissom
As a swaying creeper !
When I saw in my dream
The prince of the land
Watered by running brooks,
And where bees build
Their hives of honey
On the broad spathes
Of tall coconut palms,
I sulked in petulance,
And so
I lost the delight
Of my blossoming love.

[1532]

1. Line 1 and 2. A piece of flattery to draw her attention and make the friend sympathise with her.
2. Line 5 is a reference to the Chola King.
3. Petulant sulks are according to poetic tradition incentives to greater love.
4. The last two lines may also be interpreted as the love which has given rise to gossip.

AN ANT ENTRAPPED

On the one hand,
My maiden modesty
Restrains me
And pulls me back ;
And on the other,
My passionate heart
Moved to its inmost depths
Melts in love.
My eyes, sore troubled,
Are sleepless,
Because I have seen
And cannot forget
The comely shoulders of Killi.
And thus,
In this midnight hour,
Like an ant entrapped
On a burning brand
With both ends afire,
My heart goes forth after him,
And then turns back,
Again, and yet again.

[1554]

85

BE BRAVE

Be brave
Dear my heart,
And do not feel too shy
When you see him come near,
Say to him,
'Are the eyes of the kings of the earth
But mere blocks of wood ?' ;
And beg for gracious love
From him
Whose victorious banner
Is a tiger burning bright,
And who is the king of the land
Of bounteous streams ;
And bow down to him
And let him see
How full my shoulders are.

[1555]

Lines — 11 - 13. The tiger is the royal emblem of the Chozha Kings, and theirs is the land of streams, the well-watered delta of the Cauvery.

ARE YOU A VAMPIRE ?

O North wind,
O Utterly cold and chill
North wind !
Are you a blood-sucking vampire ?
And is it only women born
Here upon this earth
Whom you make your vassals,
To extort from them harsh tribute ?
O You ever lie in wait
Watching for a chance to hurt,
And for the slightest rift
In Killi's abundant love,
Killi, lord of frenzied elephant hosts
And of many a battle-car
Drawn by swiftly coursing steeds.

[1561]

1. Line 4. Vampire - the original Tamil word has no corresponding term in English. It means a 'disembodied ghost, a goblin, a vampire, or something like that. But still it is not sexless, and has' children' ; has hunger, and feasts upon corpses ; is cruel, frightful, vindictive, and possessive (inhabiting ruined and dilapidated homes), and can and does kill, and rejoices in the killing.

NOT AS IN OLDEN TIME

It is true
That at this midnight hour
There has come a honey bee,
Into our fair city,
Gently brushing
With its fluttering wings
The lotus flowers
And the blue lilies
Which blossom on the pools ;
But I warn you,
O cold North Wind,
Do not ever dare to come here ;
For our gracious Killi
Wields a spear,
Long and awe-inspiring :
And our city's defences
Were never so good before
As they are now. [1562]

1. The bee is regarded as a messenger of love from the king.
2. North Wind—is by poetic convention, supposed to hurt parted lovers and love-sick maids.
3. The last three lines mean 'Our defences are not like what they were in the past ; or again, 'Those times are not past when the city was well-defended', or the city is much better defended now. The exact meaning of the words is not clear.

PART III

CHERA KINGS

Names and appellations occurring in the poems

1. Cheralar-ko
2. Cheran
3. Kothai
4. Kuta-natan
5. Ma-k-katum-ko
6. Manthai-nan-natan
7. Musiriyar-koman
8. Puzhiyan
9. Puzhiyar-ko
10. Vanavan
11. Vanchi-akam (the country of Chera)

88

THE FLOOD IS ON FIRE

When the buds of red lilies
Opened their vermilion mouths
Upon the rich
Well-watered fields,
The flooding waters
Are on fire !
Think the startled birds,
And with clamorous cries
They gather close
With wings for arms
Their covering brood
In King Kothai's land—
Of Kothai who wields
An envenomed spear
With leaf-like tip.

[829]

Envenomed spear—throws an interesting side-light on the use of poisoned spears in battle.

89

THE GLORIOUS SLUSH

Joyous revellers
Pass the drink
To their boon companions ;
And those carousers'
Unsteady hands
Spill the liquor ;
And those delicious drops
All run together ;
And when tall and stately elephants
Tread upon them,
They form a slush
In the heart of Vanchi
The city of flowery groves.

[862]

Vanchi—is the capital of Chera Kings. See note to verse 107.

HE WAS PROVOKED

Charred desolation
Stretches wide ;
Stinging shrubs of thorn
Cluster thick
All over the place ;
Jackals, prowl everywhere ;
A spreading conflagration links
The four quarters together ;—
There in the country
Whose people caused
The red-veined eyes of Kothai
To flush an angry red,
Kothai whose shoulders' might
Annihilates his foes.
And the eyes of lord
Are ablaze with green fury.

[1278]

Red-veined eyes-thin streaks of red lines in the eyes are regarded as a sign of beauty.

THEY LIE IN RUINS

Thickly matted
With rooting harialli grass ;
Overspread
With wild calabash creepers ;
And overgrown
With black-vailay in flower ;
Fair cities lay unrecognisable
In the country of those
Who in battle
Provoked to flaming anger
The bright lance with leaf-like tip
Of the king of Musiri folk,
Of Kothai who wears garlands
Of blossoming flower buds.

[1279]

1 Hariaili—a variety of grass much used for lawns.

2. Calabash—also called bottle gourd. The cultivated variety is bland, and used as a vegetable.

3. black-vailay–A curious mis - name, for the shrub bears white flowers. Botanically *Gynandropsis pentaphylla*.

4. Musiri—an ancient sea - port (Muziris) near Cranganore on the west coast in the territory of Chera Kings.

IF YOU WISH TO LIVE

Listen O Kings,
And lords of elephant hosts !
Yield at once
Your due tribute
If you wish to live :
And decorate
Your long and mighty
Fortress walls,
With the beautiful sign
Of the bended bow.
Look ! Even the celestial gods
On whose lush garlands
No petal ever fades,
Have painted
Up in the sky
Vanavan's heraldic bow
That they may dwell secure.

[1285]

1. The bended bow is the royal emblem of Chera Kings, just as the tiger is the emblem of Chola, and fish that of Pandya.
2. Lines 11 - 13. Gods (celestials) of heaven differ from men in a few things. Their eyes never wink, their feet never touch the earth, their garlands never fade, and they never grow old or die.

93

HERE'S ANOTHER ROYAL UMBRELLA

Through force of habit born
Of smashing to pieces
Royal umbrellas,
Gleaming white,
Spread out wide,
And festooned with pearls,
Of many a king
Of exceeding might,
The spirited war-elephant,
Of Kothai the Great,
Whose eyes are flushed an angry red,
In its frenzy,
And white-hot with rage
Stretches up his trunk
Absent mindedly
To pluck the orb of the moon.

[1388]

94

GENTLE AFTER HIS VICTORY

The war-elephant of Kothai
Of the red lance gleaming bright,
Whom none ever dare approach
In joined battle,
Having knocked down
The fortress walls
Of enemy kings
Who in their arrogant pride
Had not knelt down to him ;
And having won his war,
Stood flushed and radiant,
Squirting upon his young mate
Sprays of water
From the glistening cascade
Upon the slope of the hill.

[1397]

95

JACKAL WHELPS

Upon the field of battle
Where the warriors
Who had no sooner glimpsed
The lord of the Puzhis
Than they fell dead,
Slain by him,
Little jackal whelps
Sitting upon the bracelets
On the shoulders
Of kings wearing emerald jewels,
And tugging hard
At their diamond braceleted forearms,
Are hurt by the armlets,
And writhing in pain,
Howl shrilly.

[1431]

Puzhi—a region in the territory of Chola Kings.

THE EARTH IS MORE GLORIOUS

The heavens are far surpassed
By the earth's loveliness ;
Like the stars of heaven
Are the earthly kings of might ;
And as glorious as the moon
Moving among the stars of heaven
Is he,
The Chera called Kothai,
The sovereign lord
Of the people who dwell
On Kolli Mountain
Which towers up to heaven.

[1467]

Kolli mountain—Chera is the lord of those who dwell on the mountain. Its location is uncertain. It has been placed in the Trichinopoly district by some scholars, but it is doubtful if they are right.

THE TWO ENDS OF THE LANCE

The gleaming lance
Of Kothai, wearer of garlands
Of blossoming flower buds,
The lance which was flung
At enemy kings
And struck them down
Is redolent
Of raw flesh and red sandal paste.
Humming bees and black beetles
Hover thick
Around one end,
And around the other
Packs of jackals
Leap in joy.

[1471]

Line 8—The sandal paste may refer to the practice of offering respect to the lance of victory, by smearing sandal paste on it, and garlanding it with the garlands of the slain foemen.

THE ONLY DIFFERENCE

The God
Who rides the bull
And the Chera King
Who wages intrepid and fierce war,
Are equal
In strength and valiant deeds.
But they are dissimilar
In this alone.
The God who wields
The deadly battle-axe
Has three eyes,
While Chera
Of valorous might
Has but two.

[Commentary]

Note—This verse is not in any manuscript available now, but is found quoted by Ilampooranar, one of the quartet of commentators to illustrate a point he was making.

1. Lines 1 and 2—refer to Siva, one of the Hindu Trinity.
2. Lines 9 to 11—also refer to Siva, who has a third eye in the middle of his fore-head.

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99

THE WORN-OUT DOOR PEGS

Again and again
The matrons close,
And as often again
Do the maidens re-open
The swinging street door
Which commands a view
Of the royal procession
Of Kothai, who wears a chaplet
Of choicest flowers
Over which bees hover,
And who rides a chariot
Drawn by galloping steeds.
So often have those doors
Swung to and fro
That the pivoting door-pegs
Have worn out quite.

[1508]

Door pegs—In olden days the doors had no hinges. They pivoted on pegs which projected up and down, and moved in sockets.

100

IS IT SEEMLY ?

O Mandai's king
Whose broad chest
Is as firm as a mountain,
And who with your phalanx of spear-men
Which stands in close and serried rows,
Make your enemies bow down to you,
Is it meet and seemly
Of you to rob
The fair loveliness
Of young and charming maids
Who wear at their slender wrists
Nestling rows of bangles ?
Don't you hear
Their mothers exclaim,
'Fie upon him
He does not hold
His sceptre straight' ?

[1517]

Manḍai—a city in the Chera King's territory.

101

TENDER SPROUTS AND PALE GOLD

Those maidens, who saw
Kothai, Lord of chariot-hosts
And of galloping steeds
As he drove by
In his horse-drawn chariot,
Lost but the lustre
Of their limbs
Which gleamed like tender mango sprouts ;
But the pallid green
Now suffusing my body
Like pale gold,
Is its sheen not worth
A million times
The gleam of tender mango sprouts ?

[1518]

Mango sprouts—a conventional simile.

O SAVE ME, PRAY

O Fellow-citizens,
Whose abiding loving kindness
Is like clear limpid water
And the cool shade of trees,
O save me, pray.
For my heart lies helpless
Consumed by a burning love
For Kothai,
King of the Poozhi folk,
And whose frenzied elephants
Trumpet loudly in the fray.

[1582]

The last line—may mean 'which delight in war', or 'which love battles'.

103

CAN SHE SHUT OUT GOSSIP ?

She, my mother
Would not let me look
At Kothai,
Whose army is as vast as the sea ;
And it was in vain
That she bolted and barred
Our only street-door.
Dear friend !
How well-matched are your jewels !
But by closing that door
Could she close too
The mouths of those
Who in gossip
Link my name with his ?

[1541]

HOW DID THEY KNOW ?

On Mandai's environs lie
Groves of mast-wood trees
And a spread of cool waters,
And groves of coconut palms ;
The long-leaved gamboge too
Stands there in bloom.
Look ! It was but once,
And in the dark night,
And in a mere dream,
That the lord of that fair land came
And gently stroked my limbs.
How in the world
Did they know of it ?

[1547]

105

THE HEART IN TWO MINDS

I started up to see Kothai,
Wearer of swaying garlands
And jewels of gold
Set with choicest gems ;
But overcome with shyness
I shut the outer door.
Yet, like the beggars who throng
At the gates of the lordly rich,
My poor heart
Keeps coming to the door
And going back,
And with restless unease
Is moving to and fro.

[1553]

UNDER THE COLD MOON

Tell me, Dear friend,
Does my heart
Which went out to see
Kothai who wields
A long and angry spear,
And wears jewels of yellow gold
Set with choicest gems,
And garlands swaying to and fro,
Does my heart stand waiting
At his tall fortress gate
Under this bitterly cold moon,
With but its hands
For a wrap ?

[1557]

Line 11—Moon may mean 'month'

THE VANISHED RESENTMENT

'Let him come here
If he dare,
The king of the western country,
Lord of Vanchi City !'
So cried she,
The bright-bangled maiden,
And she let all who were near her
Know of her anger,
But, when he came
And she saw him,
On that instant,
All her resentment
Fled.

[1564]

1. King of west country—Chera.
2. Vanchi — Capital of the Cheras, identified by some as Karur in Trichinopoly District, but scholars and archaeologists are not fully agreed yet.

108

VERY GRAVE CHARGES

'He is the thief
Who stole my comeliness !'
'He is the robber
Who broke down
The ramparts of my modesty !'
Thus the maidens cry,
My friend, whose speech
Is so delightfully sweet !
Wherever he goes
He, Kothai,
King of the Chera folk.
Grave, very grave,
Are the charges
Made against him.

[1567]

WHAT A FOOLISH HOPE

If my dear mother
Should prepare a holy spot,
And sprinkle thereon
The blood of a ram,
And bathe and cleanse me,
And cry,
'Leave her and go !'
Would my malady leave me,
The malady which has taken hold
Of the domain of my heart
And makes me pine for Kothai,
Wielder of a fierce and angry spear,
Victor in waged wars,
And ever supreme
On the field of battle.

[1568]

Malady – Lovesickness which the mother thinks is due to 'possession' by a bad spirit and which can be driven away by invoking Muruga and offering him gifts in the traditional manner. This is a recurring theme in love poetry.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

To that great
And fierce king
Of the land of Manthai folk
Rich with waters' abundance—
O Friend,
How lovely is the *tilak*
Upon your brow :—
To him in person
We must needs complain
Of our woes.
Since that seems to be
The way of the world today.

[1570]

1. Tilak — A round mark placed by women on their forehead. It is both auspicious and beautiful.
2. The last line suggests that. unless one complains, one would not get relief at the present day.

AFTER-WORD

Mr. M. Arunachalam, the Director of the new multilanguage Institute in Madras, is a fine and deep scholar in Tamil, who has not allowed his scholarship to case-harden him, and make him oblivious to the beauty and enjoyment of poetry. He holds many firm convictions after earnest seeking and thought, and has not permitted his personal loyalties to over-ride his final judgments, which may differ from those of others.

He has helped me in this translation with the expression of a difference in respect of the first verse (Invocation), and of a solution as regards the meaning of verse 94 (the mangled verse No. 1397 of *Purattirattu*). Here is how. I am grateful for both.

Verse 1 (Invocation) :

He thinks that my interpretation of the word "Atiraiyan" (The man of Atirai) as 'He was *born* under the star Ardra' is not right, as it is opposed to orthodox canons of Siva cult, which hold the view that Siva alone, of all the Gods, has been there far before time. So he says that the meaning is, 'He *dwells* in the star Ardra'. I have dared to differ, on two grounds in the main.

Believers in revealed religions hold their own God to be the ultimate, and all other Gods (if they are

accepted at all) as born or created later. Since the verse itself refers to a heedless and deluded world, the people may be allowed to believe that he was born under a star, in order to show up the extent of their folly.

Mr. Arunachalam says that Siva is Primordial, Ultimate, and Omnipresent, and All-Pervasive. So, to say that such a God dwells in a named star is sheer folly; and that would be enough to provide the contrast. I hold that the contrast is better brought out by saying he is *born under* a particular star, when actually (as stated earlier in the verse) it was he who *created* that and all the other stars and planets.

Every religious cult (and every sectarian too) holds that its own God is ultimate and primordial, just as the followers of the Siva cult believe that Siva was the oldest of the Gods, the followers of the Vishnu cult hold that it was Vishnu who created all others, and was therefore the oldest in time. Just as Ardra is sacred to Siva, Sravanam (Tiru-Onam) is the star sacred to Vishnu. It is the star Altair in the constellation Aquila (the Eagle). However, we find that Periyalwar, one of the great Vaishnavite hymnists and saints, stating that Vishnu was born under the star Onam. He sings in his Periya-Thirumozhi 2 : 4 : 2 'the sacred Onam in which you were born.'

So, I have left the translation as it is; but have felt it to be my duty to acquaint the reader with the differences in interpretation, which may affect people in different and unexpected ways.

Verse 94 (1397 of Purattirattu)

This is the mangled verse referred to in the introduction as making no sense in its mutilated form. Almost all the editors of *Muttollayiram* have omitted it. Professor Vaiyapuri Pillai suggested some emendations, but they have not improved the position. Mr. Arunachalam, to whom I referred the matter, made some radical changes, which have made the verse meaningful, and have given it a flavour of tenderness and love. Yet I must confess that the alterations, though brilliant, are merely subjective, and have no textual authority. However, I have accepted the verse in the emended form, and have translated it and presented it to the reader, instead of leaving a gap.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

P. N. Appuswami, though trained for and practised the profession of law till his retirement, has managed to cultivate the 'graces' with equal devotion and has been a pioneer in the great task of fitting Tamil prose to serve as an adequate medium of modern Scientific thought. He has many firsts to his credit both in literary and journalistic spheres. His extensive and intimate familiarity with the high-ways and by-ways of Tamil Literature through the ages is fortified by a knowledge of Sanskrit and English classics, which is very much out of the common. He has done singular service to Tamil by his brilliant English renderings of Tamil classics. He is the author of a number of works in English and Tamil.

'Love in the valley', an English rendering by him, of Kurinci-p-pattu has already appeared in this series.

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15.	Kadambari - Moolamum Vasanamum	
16.	Cilappatikaram.	